Fairy Tale Retelling: Translation and Domestication in *A Wolf at the Door*

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RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de Máster pretende, por un lado, presentar una traducción al español de un texto que no haya sido traducido aún y, por otro lado, analizar hasta qué punto la estrategia de domesticación empleada en traducción puede considerarse un *retelling*, particularmente cuando se trata de traducir cuentos de hadas.

El texto traducido se corresponde con cuatro narraciones que pertenecen al género de los *fairy tale retellings*. Los cuentos de hadas ganaron popularidad en el siglo XIX, cuando autores como los hermanos Grimm o Hans Christian Andersen comenzaron a publicar volúmenes que recogían gran parte de las historias tradicionales europeas. Desde entonces, estos clásicos han sido reescritos y reinventados en multitud de ocasiones y formatos, y en la actualidad tiene lugar un fenómeno conocido como *fairy tale retelling*, que consiste en la publicación de nuevas versiones de los cuentos de toda la vida. Este es el caso de las cuatro historias seleccionadas, las cuales fueron publicadas en una antología llamada *A Wolf at the Door* (2000) y que oficialmente no ha sido traducida.

El presente trabajo está dividido en seis apartados diferentes. En el primero se realiza una introducción, seguida de una parte teórica que abarca las tres secciones siguientes. El quinto apartado recoge la parte práctica y a su vez está dividido en dos bloques, el primero de los cuales consigna la traducción al español de los cuentos seleccionados y el segundo describe el análisis de las historias, centrado en las similitudes observables entre *retelling* y domesticación. Para acabar, un apartado con las conclusiones a las que se han llegado cierra el trabajo.

El marco teórico comienza con una presentación del género de los cuentos de hadas. Se relata su evolución a lo largo de los años hasta la actualidad, así como los rasgos que caracterizan estos cuentos. A continuación, se introduce el *retelling* y se describen las técnicas empleadas en su desarrollo. El bloque teórico finaliza con una argumentación sobre la relación que existe entre la traducción y el *retelling* y, por ende, la relación que podría existir entre la estrategia de domesticación y el *retelling*.

El bloque práctico presenta en la primera parte la propuesta de traducción de las historias seleccionadas, así como un breve análisis de los problemas encontrados en la elaboración de las traducciones y las soluciones a las que se ha llegado. También se destaca que la traducción se llevó a cabo tratando de respetar el texto original lo máximo posible, así como al autor que se encuentra detrás de cada historia. En la segunda parte se propone un

encargo ficticio en el que se requiere una domesticación máxima de los textos que sirva para ilustrar la relación entre la domesticación y el *retelling*. Para llevar esto último a cabo se ha realizado en primer lugar una comparación entre los cuentos aquí traducidos y sus versiones originales, de tal manera que ilustren las técnicas empleadas por los *retellings*, presentadas en la parte teórica. En segundo lugar, se ha elaborado una sugerencia de las referencias y estructuras que habría que domesticar en cada texto para que el lector pueda imaginarse cuál sería el resultado final. Finalmente, estos dos análisis han servido para comparar las versiones finales de lo que es un *retelling*, y de lo que serían las historias domesticadas y así hallar las similitudes entre ambos procesos que confirmen o nieguen que las dos técnicas siguen esquemas similares.

Para concluir, cabe mencionar que toda técnica tiene aspectos a favor y aspectos en contra. Por ello, se podría continuar con esta línea de investigación para que la domesticación de textos se viera más como una manera de crear nuevas versiones de otras historias, en vez de ser considerada una estrategia que simplemente reduce los valores extranjeros presentes en un texto, y que con ello ignora las intenciones que pudieran tener los autores que están detrás de esas historias.

ABSTRACT

Among the different discussions in translation, there is a view that suggests translation may be partly retelling. Taking this as a starting point, the present master's dissertation aims to explore the relation between a translation strategy, domestication, and retelling in order to explore whether they follow similar schemes or not. Additionally, this dissertation aims to present a translation of four previously untranslated short stories, taken from the contemporary anthology *A Wolf at the Door*. In order to accomplish this, the translation of four tales is presented, which belong to the genre of fairy tale retellings. This genre was selected because it allows the researcher the possibility to study the retelling techniques employed and to compare them to the techniques necessary to domesticate a text. Therefore, along with the translation of these stories an analysis studying the retellings and their possible domestication is presented.

Keywords: translation, fairy tale, retelling, domestication, *A Wolf at the Door*

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1. Introduction

The aims of the paper have been twofold: on the one hand, to present a Spanish translation of an English story untranslated so far and on the other hand, to explore the concept of retelling, and its relation to that of domesticated translation.

In order to do this, our first task was to select a genre. Short stories and more particularly fairy tale retellings, were thought to be a good choice. Due to their length, tales present the perfect format to offer a full product and tell a complete story. Additionally, fairy tales, a text type in constant variation, is experiencing nowadays an extraordinary revival. The retelling of traditional stories with different twists has become a most popular literary genre. Tales seem to be still used to make sense of people's lives in one way or another. Moreover, as fairy tales are stories that are prone to be retold, they are an ideal subject for this analysis: it seems adequate to analyse the possibility that domesticating a text is similar to writing a retelling by using retellings of other stories as examples.

Furthermore, it is to be noted that fairy tale retellings have not been a focus of attention in scholarly literature as much as the original tales. In this sense, the analysis of fairy tale retellings has been identified as a research gap. In Hixon's words:

> "Thoughtful examination of contemporary folktale revisions, especially those aimed at a child audience, still lags behind; scholarly studies by Zipes, Tatar, and company notwithstanding, the critical lens, when aimed at folktales, is still focused more on the classic tales tan on mother revisions, on the tales produced by the French raconteurs, the Brothers Grimm, and other nineteenth-century collectors rather than on the deliberate revisioning of those tales that took place in the last half of the twentieth century and is still going strong" (Hixon, 2007: 196)

Lastly, fairy tales and their retellings do not usually constitute a topic in literature courses. They are sometimes introduced in school for children or middle-graders. However, the academic consideration of folktales and fairy tales and their cultural importance seems to be lacking in higher education degrees, but for the ones concerned with children's education, such as Education or Pedagogy programs.

Regarding the short stories that were chosen to be translated and analysed, they belong to in *A Wolf at the Door and other Retold Fairy Tales*, an anthology edited by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow (2000), including texts by different authors. It should be noted

that the anthology has not been translated into Spanish yet, as proved by the fact that neither the selected stories nor the book itself were found in the catalogue of the *Biblioteca Nacional de España*.

The selection process was followed by a search of information regarding the anthology itself and its target audience. This was of paramount importance to determine what type of translation should be made. Finally, the translation was decided to seek a teen audience from the western globalized world, which means that our potential readers would have a knowledge of international settings and references. As there were no other conditions, this allowed for the translator to be respectful to the author following a foreignizing strategy in most of the text. Additionally, as the selected texts were authored literary pieces, it seemed appropriate to keep to the author's voice as closely as possible.

The next step was to investigate on the theoretical and practical considerations about the nature and main guidelines of fairy tale-retelling and its relationship with translation, and more specifically with the so-called domesticated translation.

After the theoretical research and the actual translation were done, an imaginary translation commission was devised in order to approach the second goal of our project. The experimental translator's commission would consist on producing a domesticated translation targeted at a specific group of local readers, which would require for the translator to domesticate everything possible in the texts. This goal implied the selection of the textual elements that would be subjected to a domestication strategy, including names, settings or landscapes. Results for this experimental translation project are offered in the form of tables, illustrating the terms and expressions in the source text for which a domesticated solution was necessary. The comparison between the source text, the English retelling of the stories and the potential final domesticated translation which might have been conceivably commissioned to an unidentified translator would lead us to draw some final conclusions on the relationship between translation and retelling.

All in all, this paper is organized as follows: the theoretical part consists firstly, on an introduction to the genre of fairy tales, their history and evolution, and a brief exploration on retellings and fairy tale retellings; secondly, the relationship between translation, domestication and retelling is revised. In section five, of a more practical nature, the anthology is presented, followed by the translations of four stories and a general summary of the translation problems that were encountered. Lastly, an experimental domesticated translation project is presented and an assessment on the similarities shared between

translation and retellings is offered, guided by the theoretical tenets as reviewed in parts 3 and 4. A final section is devoted to main conclusions.

2. What is a fairy tale?

Fairy tales are a type of narrative, which has existed in every culture in different ways, probably for thousands of years. As an introductory description, the following lines will serve:

> These narratives, often set in the distant past, allow us to escape to a world very unlike our own. They usually follow a hero or heroine who comes up against some sort of obstacle (or obstacles) – from witches and ogres, to dwarves and (as the name suggests) fairies. ("Telling (fairy) tales | OUPblog", 2017)

The origins of fairy tales can be found in the oral tradition of folktales. Since they were transmitted orally, the same tale could be found in different cultures ("Telling (fairy) tales | OUPblog", 2017). Originally, many of the famous fairy tales known to western readers were thought to be from the 16th or 17th century, but some fairy tales, such as *Beauty and the Beast* or *Jack and the Beanstalk* can be traced back to thousands of years, according to researchers:

> Durham University anthropologist Dr Jamie Tehrani, said Jack and the Beanstalk was rooted in a group of stories classified as The Boy Who Stole Ogre's Treasure, and could be traced back to when Eastern and Western Indo-European languages split more than 5,000 years ago. ("Fairy tale origins thousands of years old, researchers say - BBC News", 2016)

These new theories would support the view of the Grimm Brothers, who believed that many of the fairy tales that they popularised "were rooted in a shared cultural history dating back to the birth of the Indo-European language family" ("Fairy tale origins thousands of years old, researchers say - BBC News", 2016).

Nevertheless, no matter how old these tales are, they still have their roots in folktales, as before they were ever written down, they were merely stories that were told and passed down from generation to generation.

2.1. Folktales

Folktales, as expressed above, are oral stories passed down from one generation to another. These stories are "a form of traditional literature which began as an attempt to explain and understand the natural and spiritual world" (Carney, n.d.).

But not only do folktales spread through generations, they also spread through societies, giving place to different versions of the same story, adapting to the different elements of diverse cultures and places. Some spread through sea, thanks to sailors or soldiers, while others spread through land travel, thanks to the migrations of people. The basics of the story usually remain the same but details of the plot and the characters shift. It is interesting that "folktales that travelled by land changed a great deal because of the retelling process, while those that travelled by sea were more similar in version" (Carney, n.d.).

The study of folktales and their origins is a field that unites experts of different areas. Trying to decipher why folktales have evolved in such a way and not another is something that can enlighten us on experiences of the human race:

> Folktales, more than any other type of story, embody our shared fantasies, fears and experiences. Understanding which elements of them remain stable and which ones change as they get transmitted across generations and societies can therefore provide a unique window into universal and variable aspects of the human condition. As such, they represent a potentially rich point of contact between anthropologists, folklorists, literary scholars, biologists and cognitive scientists (Tehrani, 2013).

2.1.1.Folktale genres

In the traditional literature that folktales represent there are different genres that can be distinguished, according to their themes or prominent elements. Folktale is everything that was transmitted orally before it was ever recorded in paper. There are plenty of classifications concerning what types of folktales there are. One of these classifications states that, among folktales, people can find fairy tales, tall tales, legends, myths, fables, and even proverbs (Routman, 2005).

Tall tales are "exaggerated yarns with larger-than-life characters" (Freeman, 2007: 16). They are exaggerations of the traits of characters, that may have existed. Legends, in turn, have a main character who achieves the status of hero and legend thanks to their "real or supposed deeds" (Freeman, 2007:16). Additionally, the characters may have been real and their status of legend is thanks to the many stories created about them (Lombardi, 2016). Myths, in contrast, are "traditional stories that may answer life's overarching questions, such as the origins of the world and/or of a people" (Lombardi, 2016). They usually involve the interaction of gods with humans and can be "an attempt to explain mysteries, supernatural events, and cultural traditions" (Lombardi, 2016). Fables, finally, are "tales with a stated or easily understood moral" (Freeman, 2007:16). They tend to be very short stories with animals as protagonists.

For this paper, nevertheless, the genre of interest is that of fairy tales, which are defined by Routman (2005) as "stories with fairies or other magical creatures, usually for children". This definition serves to understand the basics of what a fairy tale entails. However, it should be kept in mind that originally the fairy tales that we know today were not so sweet stories, as they had a more adult audience in mind. More modern versions were rewritten for children audiences, thus eliminating some of the cruellest elements.

2.2. Fairy tales

As has just been said, fairy tales are stories that usually incorporate some magical elements or enchantments, tasks and quests. Additionally, there are characters such as witches, fairies, ghosts or giants, and they "represent the fulfilment of human desires – virtues of generosity, love, kindness and truth prevail, while greed, hate, wickedness, and evil are punished" (Freeman, 2007: 16).

2.2.1.Evolution

Nowadays, folklorists distinguish between wonder folktales and literary fairy tales. Wonder folktales "originated in oral traditions throughout the world and still exist" (Zipes, 2015a), whereas, literary fairy tales "emanated from the oral traditions through the mediation of manuscripts and print and continue to be created today in various mediated forms throughout the world" (Zipes, 2015a). Nevertheless, both types form the

huge and complex genre of fairy tales, as "they are inextricably dependent on one another" (Zipes, 2015a) and can't be clearly distinguished from each other, since "even when every effort was made to keep the two branches apart, fairy tales would insist on becoming literature" (Warner, 2014a).

Some of the best-known fairy tales were first made popular by the Grimm Brothers. In the 1800s, the Grimm Brothers "determined to preserve the Germanic oral story telling that was banishing, poured over the folklore of the region" (Ogden, 2014). However, the stories from their first collection were full of atrocious events, so in order to sell more books they had to "provide lighter interpretations of these factual incidents" (Ogden, 2014). Therefore, they followed the example of previously printed fairy tales, such as those published by Charles Perrault, who is considered "the father of fairy tales" (Ogden, 2014). It is important to note, though, that all of the fairy tales of that time were intended for adults. However, the barbaric events that characterize these stories do not constitute the main focus of attention of fairy tales.

> The morals these stories convey are far more important than the events themselves, the circumstances of which are often forgotten. These cautionary tales, where good conquers evil, the wicked get punished, the righteous live happily ever after, offer hope that one can do something positive about changing oneself and the world" (Ogden, 2014).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the fairy tale had become an established institution in Germany, thanks mostly to the works of the Grimm Brothers, who "established the framework of the genre, one that has become a cultural field of production in which various writers convene to voice their personal needs and a social need for pleasure and power under just conditions" (Zipes, 2015b: 246). Unlike in other parts of Europe, such as France, where the fairy tale declined in popularity by the French Revolution, or England, where the genre did not revive until the Victorian era thanks, partly, to the German influence, in Germany it became "a major mode of expression" (Zipes, 2015b: 246).

It was during the end of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries that literature for children began to really take shape. During this time, authors such as Hans Christian Andersen tried to write fairy tales that reimagined "the world from both an adult and a child's perception simultaneously" (Teverson, 2013), and in doing so the perception of

fairy tales started to change. It is no coincidence that "the fairy tale for children came into its own from 1830 to 1900" (Zipes, 2015b: xxviii), which was when Andersen published his works. Even with the revisions that the Grimm Brothers made of their works to make them more suitable for children, he was the one that truly accomplished what Perrault had begun, which was to write tales that "could be readily grasped by children and adults alike" (Zipes, 2015b: xxviii).

Afterwards, during the twentieth century, new attempts at rewriting the classical fairy tales were made. These authors have given new spins to the classic tales, with authors such as Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee or Angela Carter, who "have reclaimed them for adult readers" (Parry, 2015) and in the process they have recovered some of the goriest details of their original versions.

Nowadays fairy tales are still popular and continue to be reproduced over and over in different ways. Now it is not just literature or theatre that benefits from these stories, but also the cinema and television industries.

> Considered children's literature for a dominant period of their history, fairy tales have now grown out of that Victorian and Edwardian prescription and have gained a new stature over the last 20 years, both as inspiration for literature, and for mass, lucrative entertainment (Warner, 2014a).

2.2.2.Characteristics

Folktales, and particularly fairy tales, have a series of common characteristics. They are "one-dimensional, depthless, abstract, and sparse; their characteristic manner is matter-of-fact" (Warner, 2014b: xx).

They often begin with a phrase of uncertain time, such as the English *Once upon a time* and end with another recurrent time expression of eternal bliss, like *happily ever after*. Furthermore, the most repeated theme is good vs. evil, with evil always succumbing and good imposing (Routman, 2005). Other themes found in this kind of tales are also "universal truths, lessons and values related to people" (Sweetland, n.d.). Moral lessons, are then, always present in fairy tales, whether it is in one way or another.

> Together, storytellers and listeners have collaborated through intuition as well as conscious conception to form worlds filled with naïve morality. Fundamental to the feel of a fairy tale is its moral pulse. It tells us what we lack and how the world has to be organized differently so that we received what we need (Zipes, 2012: 14).

In general, "the stories deal with real human experience in an unmanageable and unjust world, and the hope of transformation and happy ending" (Hahn, 2015: 195). Within the theme of human experience, there are three different categories that can be seen in fairy tales: the psychology of the individual, the sociology of the community and the cosmology of the universe (Swann Jones, 2013: 19). To achieve the purpose of showing these different experiences while at the same time entertaining the reader, we often see recurring patterns, one of them being the use of magic and enchantments.

> They [fairy tales] have a unique atmosphere, cast of character types, and props: cottages and castles, monsters and princesses, magic mountains and bottomless wells. They are so specialised that anyone who is familiar with folk narrative – child or adult – can recognize an example of the genre readily, even if they have never heard the specific tale before (NiDhuibhne, 2014).

As for the characters, they tend to be flat, as there is not time to delve into their personalities: "the heroes and heroines are usually mortal human beings, though with no psychological complexity" (Hahn, 2015: 195). Usually, they are either good or bad and that is the important thing for the tale. The hero, or heroine, depending on the tale, is, more times than not, quite young and has a fixed set of characteristics (Sweetland, n.d.). Some of the stereotypical heroic characters that appear in fairy tales are royalty, while others come from poverty.

Every fairy tale needs a hero and a villain. The hero is usually a kind and naïve person who has to overcome some obstacles or complete some tasks, while the villain wants power and destruction often using magic to achieve his or her goals. Additionally, there is sometimes the character of a 'friend', who can be human or animal, and helps the hero, often giving him magical gifts ("LibGuides: Fairy Tales: Conventions of Fairy Tales", 2016).

Regarding the description of the setting, it follows the same line as the characters'. They are not elaborated on. The plot is simple too, but intends to be "thought provoking" and "didactic" (Sweetland, n.d.). The action moves fast so as to catch the listener's attention. The importance of fairy tales, therefore, does not reside in the events of the story themselves, but on the truths it aims to explore:

> Fairy tales have always been truthful metaphorical reflections of the customs of their times, that is, of the private and public interrelations of people from different social classes seeking to determine the meaning of their lives. The truth value of a fairy tale is dependent on the degree to which a writer is capable of using a symbolic narrative strategy and stereotypical characterization to depict, expose or celebrate the modes of behaviour that were used and justified to attain distinction and power in the civilizing process of a given society. Whether oral or literary, the tales have sought to uncover truths about existential conflicts and the intricacies of our civilizing processes (Zipes, 2015b: 239).

The field of fairy tales is an area so large and complex that several more pages could be filled with commentaries about them. However, as fairy tales as such are not the focus of this paper, their characteristics will not be explained in further depth here. Nevertheless, for more information on fairy tales as a literary genre and their characteristics, there are scholarly books, challenging and inspiring, where fairy tales are studied in detail. Some of these books are *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, edited by Jack Zipes (2015); *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination,* written by Steven Swan Jones (2002); *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale*, written by Marina Warner (2014); or *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*, written by Jack Zipes (2012).

3. Fairy tale retellings

Fairy tale retellings enable an author to take a traditional story and change it into something else. Retellings can be used to change the original message of a story, or to change the main characters, so as to give the tale a new significance. In short, "retelling a fairy tale is about taking that fairy tale and putting a different spin on it" ("Defining Retellings | Retellings of Fairytales", 2013). This means that the main plot or, at least, the

most important aspects of the plot will still be there, but the remaining pieces will be different. The purpose of a retelling is that the reader discovers a new take on a traditional story, while at the same time being able to identify the original one.

3.1. Why keep writing and reading fairy tales?

During the twentieth century a new and ever-growing literary trend was started concerning the retelling of fairy tales. Year after year new retellings emerge in western literature, some offering new views of classical tales, others offering not so many novelties. Nevertheless, fairy tales don't seem to be out of fashion ever, and, with these new versions, every person, no matter their age, has the opportunity to enjoy them. According to Zipes, there seem to be solid reasons for it:

> We ward off fairy tales and pretend that they are intended mainly for children because they tell more truth than we want to know, and we absorb fairy tales because they tell us more truth than we want to know. They are filled with desire and optimism. They drip with brutality, bluntness, violence, and perversity. They expose untruth, and the best are bare, brusque, and concise. They stamp our minds and perhaps our souls. They form another world, a counter world, in which social justice is more readily attained than in our actual world where hypocrisy, corruption, hyping, exploitation, and competition determine the outcome of social and political interactions and the quality of social relations (Zipes, 2015a).

The themes they deal with are human experiences – like the search for the truth or the discovery of yourself – that still exist today and will exist tomorrow, no matter how much our world evolves, and through them "we learn from their twists and turns […] that truth may abide in the strangeness of fantasy" (Handler Spitz, 2010). Moreover, they "stimulate rainbows of feeling, insatiable curiosity, and inexhaustible searches for meaning" (Handler Spitz, 2015).

It seems as if the endless possibilities that fairy tales have to offer are what makes them so compelling for both, writers and readers alike. No matter the twists and turns someone adds to one fairy tale, is as if another writer can add a different spin that makes us want to read the same story all over again, as if we were hearing it for the first time.

> It is a narrative dreamland in which anything is possible, and in which the why's and when's and where's are left to the imagination of the reader. And, perhaps it is these very gaps in narrative that are drawing authors and audiences alike back to fairytales today. The very incompleteness of the stories can serve as a vivid backdrop for staging new stories, for exploring characters from new angles, and for prodding into the cracks and holes to run down those why's and when's and where's (Hecker, 2014).

Fairy tales are compelling because they portray the idea that something magical can happen to anyone, and that in the end, everything will work out the way it is supposed to. They persist through time, and people enjoys them because they don't need to be explained. They defy the logic of our world to take us somewhere else.

Moreover, as has previously been said, the essence of fairy tales remains the same. Fairy tale retellings don't try to change their original spirit, what they do is offer the same tales in a new light, often adapting them to the circumstances of the modern world.

3.1.1.Fairy tales in the modern world

For the last century, and particularly the last decade, there have been numerous new books that were either based on a fairy tale or inspired by a fairy tale. Either way, these fairy tale retellings have been very successful, not only among children but also among teenagers and adults, as there have been versions for people from every age. Furthermore, these retellings not only have appeared in the form of books, but also in the form of movies or television series.

> "Fairy tales fascinate the public, young and old. Despite vast changes in mores and beliefs, they fiercely persist. Their endurance is testified to by the fact that, in addition to the dozens of fairy-tale-inspired children's books that are published annually to unfailing profit, there appeared, between the years 2010 and 2015, at least one movie a year with a fairy-tale title or theme" (Handler Spitz, 2016).

One of the most salient characteristics of the fairy tale retelling of the twentieth and twenty first centuries is, precisely, that fairy tales are changing once again. Adults can

enjoy fairy tales written with them in mind, as these stories recuperate some of the darkest elements of the original tales, while at the same time keeping the core theme of fairy tales intact. Of course, that is not to say that adults can't enjoy the retellings written for younger audiences.

> The fairy stories (whether movie or book) that are being embraced by adult audiences are not simply repackaged fairytales in their original, or semi-original, "child-friendly" form, but rather are true "retellings" of fairytales (Heckel, 2014).

Movies such as *Ella Enchanted* (2004)*, Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012)*, Into the Woods* (2014)*, Maleficent* (2014)*, Beauty and the Beast* (2017) or *Pan* (2015) are an example of how retellings in the modern era work. Some of these movies like *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) or *Ella Enchanted* (2004) can be perfectly enjoyed by all audiences, but others such as *Maleficent* (2014) or *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) incorporate darker elements that may make them more suitable for an older viewer. But the point that they all have in common, is that "they remind us of stories we heard as children or introduce younger audiences to these timeless tales" (Banham, 2015).

On television we can also find series that reinvent fairy tales. One of these examples is the TV show *Once Upon a Time* (2011-Present), where the classic stories are intertwined and continuously reinvented to fit the mythology of the show. Another example of a series is the Spanish *Cuéntame un cuento* (2014), which was a limited series in which each episode consisted on the retelling of a different fairy tale.

As for fairy tale retellings in literature, figures such as Angela Carter, Tanith Lee or Terri Windling stand out. They have published numerous books about retellings for adult readers. Some of the most famous include Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), a collection of short stories; Tanith Lee's *White as Snow* (2000), a retelling of Snow White; or *The Fairy Tale Series*, a collection of novels retelling different tales and written by different authors, all of them edited by Terri Windling. Moreover, she is one of the editors of the book translated in this TFM. For young adult readers there are also retellings such as *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2015) by Marissa Meyer, a series of four books that retell the story of Cinderella, or Alex Flinn's *Beastly* (2007), a modern take on the story of *Beauty and the Beast*. Lastly, there have also been numerous retellings intended for children, such as Philip Pullman's *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version* (2012).

Bearing in mind that fairy tales were usually very short stories, these retellings have to be creative, as they need to adapt these short tales into something larger, something that does not bore the reader, but at the same time keeps the essence of the tale. That is why retellings are so fascinating sometimes, since they allow the writer to elaborate on details such as the character's motivations, details that were unknown to the audience before.

> Presenting relatively short fairy tales as full-length novels, films or television series poses numerous challenges, primarily due to length and lack of character development and motivations in the source texts. Consequently, novels and films must elaborate on their source tales due to the length requirements of these forms (Lee, 2016).

Therefore, the beauty of retellings is that there are plenty of possibilities on how to expand the original short fairy tales. And, as a consequence, no retelling will be exactly like any other.

3.2. Fairy tale retelling types

With the trend of retelling fairy tales, new perspectives of the traditional stories we have known since childhood have emerged. Some of these retellings' perspectives are linked to modern movements or problems, and are represented through fairy tales to reach the audience in a different way. After all, fairy tales have always dealt with human experiences in one way or another.

> Modern interpretations of fairy tales in literature and film are numerous and often reflect contemporary movements and concerns. For example, the re-evaluation of the role of the 'damsel in distress' in works such as Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* (1980) reflects the contemporary feminist movement, while Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheeseman and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) takes advantage of familiar fairy-tale tropes to construct parodically humorous postmodern stories (Hahn, 2015: 198).

One way to do a retelling is to write what Chappell (2016) calls a conventional retelling, which she defines as “a simple rewording of the original story”. This type of retelling is not likely to include any major differences.

Another option is to do a detailed retelling, which “explores the story in more detail, fleshing out the gaps and back stories, making the characters psychologically real, elaborating on each event, and bringing the story details to life” (Chapell, 2016). Novelizations of fairy tales usually involve this type of retelling, as the length requirements of a novel imply that new details have to be added to the original tale. The tale can be retold practically the same or can be changed significantly depending on the number of differences introduced.

One more new perspective is what is known as *fractured fairy tales*, which consists on retelling a story through a “different character’s eyes” ("Defining Retellings | Retellings of Fairytales", 2013) or telling the story of what happens after the original tale ends. This option involves taking different angles. The two possibilities involve exploring what happens either before or after the original story or choosing a new character’s point of view, which consists on selecting a “character/s other than the usual protagonist to focus on – this could be a minor character or a new character” (Chappell, 2016). This kind of retelling can suppose a drastic change from the original one or not, depending on “how having this different point of view changes our interpretation of the story and how many other key elements are changed” (Chappell, 2016).

The last option is to do a retelling that changes the original fairy tale in a radical manner. This can be done in different ways. The first one is to change the setting of the story, which “is essential in shaping the characters, plot and mood of a story” (Chappell, 2016). Many retellings do a modernization of the tale, which consists on setting the tale in the modern world. The second way to do this is to change the roles of the characters. By doing this, the writer “may alter who is the hero and who is the villain, swap genders, or apply some other kind of role change or inversion” (Chappell, 2016). Fairy tale retellings can also include retelling the fairy tale in a different genre. This means that an author can take a fairy tale and tell it as if it was a science fiction novel or historical fiction. Next, there is the possibility of retelling a tale while changing key events or moments of the story, which would make the retelling drastically different from the original one. Changing the events includes changing the ending of the stories or the outcome of certain characters. The next type of retelling consists on mixing different fairy tales together,

which often "creates humour and chaos, and thus challenges the traditional stories and their messages" (Chappell, 2016). A very good example of this is the previously mentioned TV Series *Once Upon a Time.*

Finally, a last type of fairy tale retelling is the feminist fairy tale, which has been widely studied. Feminist theory applied to fairy tale retellings can be described briefly as follows:

> It aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality; themes: fertility, discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy ("The Elements of a Fairy Tale", n.d.).

This type of retelling portrays women in empowered positions. They don't need someone to save them as they are the ones that do the saving. Feminist retellings draw "attention to the illusions of the traditional fairy tales by demonstrating that they have been structured according to the subordination of women, and in speaking out for women the feminist fairy tale also speaks out for other oppressed groups" (Zipes, 2014: xi).

Section 5.2.2. will illustrate how the stories translated for the present TFM have used several of these devices, such as the modernization of the setting, the *fractured fairy tale* or the changing of events, to transform the fairy tales they are based on. However, our contention is that following this line of thought, according to which the above-mentioned characteristics may serve as guides to write a retelling, the extreme use of a domestication strategy, as used in translation might also be said to be a type of retelling.

4. Retelling and domestication in translation

Taking the idea that "translations constitute creative writings in and of themselves, since they are based on interpretation and adaptation" (Jones and Schwabe, 2016: 13) as a starting point, it is possible to state that translating is also retelling.

Walter Benjamin states that no translation can exactly be as the original "for in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change" (Benjamin, 1969, as cited in Cushing and Stahlberg, 2009: 163). What this means is that changes are inevitable in translation, as they give new life to the text: "a fixed text like the bible gains new life through translation and retelling alike" (Cushing Stahlberg, 2009: 163).

Translation should be a commitment between being faithful to the source material and, at the same time, retelling the story in a natural way for the target audience. Especially since "translating and adapting, from a theoretical point of view, are complementary moments, inherent to the practice of producing sense in language through translation" (Azenha and Moreira, 2012). Both do not need to be mutually exclusive.

> Echoing Christi Merrill's (2009) emphasis on translation as both *carrying* across and *retelling*, I suggest that the ethics and responsibility of translation require retelling across time, space and struggle while upholding a commitment to carry across meanings, textures, feelings and hauntings. When translation as retelling is shaped through continuous motion between what can sometimes be starkly different worlds, then that which can be carried across must be negotiated afresh in each round of retelling depending on context, audience and needs of the struggle (Nagar, 2017: 124).

It should always be kept in mind that no matter how faithful the translation is, it will have had to be adapted at some points, as it is impossible to reproduce the exact structure and voice of one language into another. For this, in translation there are different strategies that can be followed, and depending on which ones the translator follows, the final product will be more or less adapted into the target culture. Two of these strategies are foreignization and domestication.

Drawing on Venuti's theory (1995), the concepts of domesticating and foreignizing have been widely studied. On the one hand, foreignizing means that "some significant traces of the original text are retained" (Oittinen, 2014: 42), or in other words, that the translation keeps the elements of the source culture making the reader travel to that foreign culture. And on the other hand, domesticating a text consist on assimilating "texts to target linguistic and cultural values" (Oittinen, 2014: 42), which means that any cultural reference is adapted into the target culture so that readers of that culture have no problem understanding the references. As for the elements that can be domesticated in a text, they include every reference made to cultural specific elements, names of places and characters, typical food from a certain country or even landscapes.

Applied to the genre of fairy tales, translation as retelling has been part of their history since the beginning. Different translators would bring out different aspects of the tale

onto the translation, which leads to the possibility that two translations of the same tale have very different connotations.

> Different translators will offer subtle differences in translations of tales that reveal different interpretive possibilities of the texts. For example, in the Grimm brothers' *Cinderella* (sometimes called '*Achenputtle*') something as small as the rhyme the pigeons (sometimes doves) call out as the prince rides off with the first sister can vary greatly […] Even taking into account how difficult it can be to translate poetry does not explain some of the differences in these translations, particularly the final line in each one. Cole's translation[1] presents Cinderella as passive ("waiting thy call"), while both Doubleday[2] and Zipes[3] translations focus just on pointing out the mistaken identity, Zipes' with the added detail of the ball as the original meeting place. This is a small passage of a much longer folktale, and though the plot of the story remains the same, the translators all present the text in a slightly different manner, retelling the story in their own way and thus creating a new version, a retelling, of the tale, similar to the way an oral teller would have reworked a tale, albeit in a different medium (Doughty, 2006: 10-11).

Therefore, if simply by translating, a translator is retelling, it can be understood that by using certain techniques of translation, such as domestication, the final product may end up being similar to writing a retelling. Although in different degrees depending on the approaches taken, translating and retelling don't seem to work in such vastly different ways.

In section 5.2.3. of the present TFM, a domesticating strategy will be applied to the stories here translated.

[1] Joanna Cole's *Best-Loved Folktales of the World* (1983)
[2] *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales* (1950s) published by Doubleday
[3] Zipes' *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (2000)

5. A Wolf at the Door: Two approaches

A Wolf at the Door and other Retold Fairy Tales, edited by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow, is a collection of stories of retold fairy tales from new perspectives.

As Windling and Datlow (2000) verbalize in the introduction of their anthology, "the old fairy tales, like all the best stories, were filled with all the dark and bright, all the failures and triumphs, that life has to offer" (p. viii). In this collection, a selection of authors chose a different tale and made a new story from it, "full of strangeness, humour, dark magic, and wonder" (Windling and Datlow, 2000: viii).

These short stories can be classified as middle-grade and young adult. The reason for naming both categories is because some stories could be perfectly read by middle-graders, but others contain darker elements that would perhaps make them better suited for a young adult audience. Nevertheless, one book doesn't have to fit one category entirely, as they can be enjoyed by both kinds of readers.

> These stories are excellent alternatives to the nursery tales from early childhood. Told with much darker, somber tones, *A Wolf at the Door* is a wonderful study on perspective and variation (Drennan, 2000).

The editors of the selected anthology, Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow, are well known for another fairy tale volume for adults *The Snow White, Blood Red Anthology Series*, which consists of six volumes published between 1993 and 2000, and "it features short stories and poetry by contemporary writers inspired by classic fairy tales" ("The Snow White, Blood Red Anthology Series by Ellen Datlow", n.d.). Furthermore, they have worked together on numerous other projects, "including 16 volumes of the Year's Best Fantasy and Horror anthology series, which they co-edited from 1988-2003" (Locus Publications, 2016). Other projects they have worked on together include a mythic fiction YA anthology series and several other standalone anthologies.

The four fairy tale retellings selected from this anthology to translate are the following: *The Months of Manhattan, Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse, Becoming Charise* and *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*.

The Months of Manhattan is written by Delia Sherman. Sherman is a fantasy writer and editor, born in 1951. According to her own words, her "all-time favourite books are *The Merrie Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Fairy Tales from Many Lands*" (Windling and

Datlow, 2000). The story she wrote is based on a Slavic tale known as *The Twelve Months*. It is precisely in *Fairy Tales from Many Lands*, where she first discovered this story "and the importance of being polite to people you don't know" (Windling and Datlow, 2000).

As for *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse*, it is written by Nancy Farmer. Farmer, born in 1941, is an American author of children and young-adult books. As she says in the short biography included in the book, she loves fairy tales, and on the reason as to why she chose to retell the tale of *The Goose Girl* she states:

> I was upset by fairy stories (and there are lots of them) where innocent animals were killed so the heroine could live happily ever after. In particular, I thought Falada the horse got a raw deal. How long did her head stay nailed over the gate? Who did she talk to? How did she eat? (Windling and Datlow, 2000)

Becoming Charise, written by Kathe Koja, an American writer born in 1960, retells the story of the Ugly Duckling. The author herself explains that:

> I chose to retell this story because I have been the Ugly Duckling more than once: I know how it hurts, and I know that you have to be who you are, no matter what. I hope this story helps another duckling, somewhere else (Windling and Datlow, 2000).

Finally, *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* is written by Patricia A. McKillip. The author was born in 1948 and is an American writer of both fantasy and science fiction novels, who has loved fairy tales since she was a little girl, as she claims "I read all kind of fairy tales when I was young" (Windling and Datlow, 2000). As for why she chose to retell this fairy tale she states:

> I chose to retell *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* because it has elements that stirred my imagination: an unlikely hero, twelve troublesome princesses instead of one; a subterranean world, which might be the place where dreams begin, or maybe where they end. It all depends on how you tell the story (Windling and Datlow, 2000).

5.1. Translation

As mentioned in the introduction, this translation project was approached following the current translatological practice, according to which literary works should be respectful of the author behind them. In other words, the translator tried to comply with both the style and content of the stories as far as possible. Taking Venuti's axis as a yardstick, one would say that a distinct strategy of foreignization has been favoured. Keeping in mind that the translations were made with a teen audience in mind, capable of recognizing foreign references easily, as part of the globalized western world, the translations respected most of the foreign elements included in the texts. The names of the characters, the settings, and other similar elements were respected to keep the image that the stories create when someone reads them in English. Nevertheless, some aspects or names had to be adapted and domesticated slightly, so that they would not interrupt the reading rhythm, such as the school years that are mentioned in *Becoming Charise*, which were adapted into the Spanish system.

Next, the translation of the four stories is offered, followed by a general overview of the problems encountered during the translation (see Appendix for the stories in English).

5.1.1. The Months of Manhattan

Los meses de Manhattan

Delia Sherman

Liz Wallach era una niña bastante buena. Casi siempre entregaba los deberes a tiempo, se llevaba bastante bien con su padre y trataba de ser amable con sus amigas. No era perfecta ni mucho menos. Alguna vez había mentido, diciendo que sí se había lavado los dientes y, por más que lo intentaba, era incapaz de diferenciar entre derecha e izquierda. Pero para tener diez años, no se portaba mal.

Liz vivía con su padre en un piso enorme del Upper West Side, en la ciudad de Nueva York. A veces pasaba una temporada con su madre en San Francisco o con su abuela en Cape Cod. Le gustaba ir al colegio. Todo era perfecto.

Hasta que Beth Dodson apareció en su vida.

Beth Dodson era hija de una de las novias de su padre. Cuando la novia pasó a ser la madrastra de Liz, ella y Beth se convirtieron en hermanastras. Liz estaba preparada para ser feliz. Siempre había querido tener una hermana y, en cierto modo, le gustaba que se llamaran igual: Elizabeth.

Beth, sin embargo, siempre había estado encantada de ser hija única, y no le gustaba para nada compartir nombre. Eso era solamente una de las cosas que no le gustaban. Tampoco le gustaba el colegio ni la comida china, y odiaba vivir en Nueva York. Era una ciudad enorme, sucia y ruidosa. Además, había demasiada gente.

–A lo mejor es tímida –dijo el padre de Liz–. Ya se le pasará.

Pero Beth no tenía ninguna intención de dejar de odiar Nueva York, ni nada que se le pareciera. Se quejaba por todo, de tener que caminar tres manzanas para ir a la parada del autobús, de tener clases de ballet en la École de Danse de Mme. Demipointe; de todo.

Se peleaba con su madre y no hablaba con Liz ni con su padrastro, excepto para decir que ojalá siguiera viviendo en New Rochelle con su padre y jugando al fútbol los miércoles por la tarde.

Las cosas ya no eran tan perfectas.

En noviembre, justo antes de Acción de Gracias, a Liz le mandaron un trabajo especial de historia. Tenía que ir al ala de América del museo Metropolitano de Arte y observar el mobiliario para escribir un trabajo.

La madrastra de Liz le dijo:

–Te puedo llevar y así me quedo contigo mientras Bethy está en clase de ballet. Pero tendrás que darte prisa porque a Mme. Demipointe no le gusta esperar.

Cuando Liz y su madrastra consiguieron llegar al museo, tras dejar a Beth en clase de Mme. Demipointe, ya eran las 3:00 pm. La madrastra de Liz compró dos entradas y se fue a la cafetería. Se sentó en una mesita redonda y sacó una revista del bolso.

–¿No vienes conmigo? –le preguntó Liz.

–Es tu trabajo –dijo la madrastra–. Es mejor que lo hagas tú sola. Y acuérdate de que tenemos que estar en la academia a las cuatro y media.

–Pero yo no sé donde…

–Yo tampoco –dijo la madrastra–. Pregunta.

Cuando Liz consiguió encontrar a un guardia que no estuviera ocupado con alguien, ya había perdido diez minutos de la hora que tenía. Entonces, en la sala del Tesoro Medieval, giró a la izquierda en vez de a la derecha y se perdió. Le preguntó a otro guardia, y se volvió a perder. Así se le fueron pasando minutos valiosísimos, yendo de una sala a otra, todas llenas de cuadros y estatuas.

Finalmente, a las 3:45, subió un tramo de escaleras, atravesó una puerta de cristal y se encontró en una sala pequeña y oscura, completamente vacía en la que solo había un cuadro enorme de colores brillantes.

Fuera lo que fuera aquello, no era el ala de América.

Normalmente Liz no era una llorona, pero esto ya era demasiado. Incluso si en ese momento emprendía el camino de vuelta y no se perdía ni una vez, llegaría tarde, su madrastra se enfadaría más que un taxista en un atasco y no habría hecho el trabajo.

–Debo de ser la persona con más mala suerte del mundo –dijo lloriqueando.

–¿Qué te pasa cielo?

La voz era agradable, y tenía acento del Bronx. Liz se limpió las lágrimas con la manga y miró alrededor para ver donde estaba el guardia, pero estaba sola.

Entonces se fijó en el cuadro.

Era la estatua de Atlas que hay en el Rockefeller Center rodeada por doce personas, unas de pie y otras sentadas. Había gente de todas las edades, desde una niña pequeña metida en un buzo con orejas de gato hasta un hombre mayor en silla de ruedas. Y de todas las razas imaginables, al menos que Liz supiera, excepto tal vez americanos nativos. Las demás personas iban vestidas con todo tipo de ropas distintas: desde el niño hispano que llevaba botas de nieve y chaqueta de esquiar; al joven blanco que iba en bermudas. En ese momento, una afro-americana muy guapa vestida de verano abrió la boca y dijo:

–¿Qué pasa cariño? A lo mejor podemos ayudarte.

Liz notó que el corazón empezaba a latirle muy deprisa. Estaba sorprendida, pero no tenía miedo. Había leído muchos libros en los que pasaban cosas como estas.

–Me he perdido –dijo.

–Nosotros también –dijo un chico pakistaní con pantalones holgados y sudadera–. Pero tú nos has encontrado.

Liz tuvo una idea:

–¿Queréis que le diga a un guardia que estáis aquí?

El anciano de la silla de ruedas se echó a reír. Era pálido y frágil como una taza de porcelana, pero tenía una risa cálida y abierta.

–No, gracias. Preferimos que se nos encuentre por casualidad.

–Ah –dijo Liz. Miró el reloj y vio que eran las 3:40. Pensaba que era más tarde.

–¿En que época del año estamos? –La pregunta venía de una chica que tendría la edad de Liz. Iba vestida con un impermeable rojo, botas y guantes de flores.

–Noviembre –contestó Liz.

–Odio noviembre –dijo la chica y le sacó la lengua a una mujer mayor afro-americana que estaba de pie, apoyada en un bastón.

–No es tan malo –intervino Liz–. Está el día de Acción de Gracias y hay sidra caliente. Además, vamos a casa de la abuela. Y luego ya casi es diciembre y eso significa que se acerca la Navidad. Siempre voy con mi padre a pasear en trineo por Central Park. –Pero, acordándose de Beth, suspiró–. Si todavía quiere.

–¿Y enero? –remarcó un latino de mediana edad con camiseta bordada de manga corta–. Enero es terrible.

–Y febrero y marzo también –añadió un hombre delgado y sin afeitar que llevaba varias capas de chaquetas marrones.

–A mí febrero y marzo más o menos me gustan –dijo Liz–. Me gusta pasar frío y mojarme y luego llegar a casa y entrar en calor y mirar las luces de la calle por la ventana. Además, es más fácil ir a clase en invierno porque no te apetece tanto estar en la calle. A no ser que esté nevando, claro.

–Por supuesto –dijo una mujer que llevaba un chal sobre los hombros–. Pero, ¿y abril? Sabes lo que se dice de abril, ¿verdad? Abril es el peor mes. Eso es lo que dicen.

–Marzo ventoso y abril lluvioso, sacan a mayo florido y hermoso –contestó Liz–. Además, me gusta cómo huele la tierra mojada.

–¿Incluso en Central Park? –preguntó una mujer hispana mayor con bastón.

–Sobre todo en Central Park.

–¿Y el verano? –preguntó una chica adolescente que tenía el pelo recogido en un montón de trencitas pequeñas y flores pintadas en las uñas.

–Bueno, el verano está genial –dijo Liz–. Mayo y junio son un poco más duros porque me apetece estar fuera todo el rato, y sigue habiendo colegio, pero huele muy bien y los días se hacen más largos. Y luego llegan las vacaciones de verano y nos vamos a Cape Cod. Eso es lo mejor.

–Entonces tienes que odiar el otoño –dijo un niño afro-americano con una parka muy grande.

–Pues en realidad no –contestó Liz–. Durante el verano echo de menos a mis amigos, y además mi cumpleaños es en octubre. Me encanta ver cómo las hojas de los árboles se van poniendo rojas y doradas y… –se interrumpió de repente–. Oye. Esto es genial, pero se me ha hecho tardísimo y mi madrastra me va a matar. Tengo que irme.

–Creo que nosotros podemos encargarnos de eso –dijo el joven de pantalones cortos–. ¿Verdad, Septiembre?

La mujer alisó su chal:

–Creo que deberíamos hacerlo, Junio. Y también deberíamos encargarnos del trabajo de historia. –Se dio cuenta de la cara que estaba poniendo Liz y sonrió–. No podemos hacerlo por ti. Eso no sería muy católico. Pero sí que podemos darte el tiempo que necesitas para hacerlo. Y también decirte cómo llegar al ala de América.

–Chao, chao –añadió la niña que llevaba un traje de nieve–. Buena suerte.

Y, de repente, todos desaparecieron.

Es decir, el cuadro seguía en la pared, pero era simplemente un gran lienzo con manchones brillantes que solo parecían personas si te alejabas y entrecerrabas los ojos. En la placa que había en la pared de al lado, ponía:

Los doce meses de Manhattan. Peter Minuit. Sin fecha.

Liz miró el reloj. Eran las 3:05 pm, por lo que le quedaban cincuenta y cinco minutos antes de que su madrastra empezara a preocuparse. Echó a correr y llegó directamente al ala de América sin equivocarse en ningún giro, observó todo el mobiliario y tomó notas para su trabajo hasta que vio que eran las 3:50. Entonces volvió a la cafetería sin tener que preguntar a nadie por dónde se iba. Ocurrió como si fuera pura magia.

En cuanto Liz llegó a la mesa donde estaba sentada su madrastra, ésta miró el reloj, sorprendida:

–Las cuatro en punto justas –dijo–. Tienes suerte de haber llegado a tiempo.

Al salir, caía una lluvia helada, muy cerrada, típica del mes de noviembre. No se veía ni un solo taxi y había muchas personas esperando.

–Vamos a llegar tardísimo a recoger a Beth –se quejó la madrastra de Liz.

En ese momento paró un taxi justo delante de Liz. Se abrió la puerta, el pasajero se bajó, y la madrastra de Liz se montó rápidamente, seguida de Liz. Le dijo al conductor a dónde iban, y viendo que el tráfico iba despejándose a su paso como por arte de magia, se arrellanó en el asiento, más tranquila.

–¡Vaya suerte! –exclamó.

Liz se aferró a su cuaderno y sonrió.

Desde ese momento, las cosas comenzaron a ir mucho, mucho mejor.

No solo paraban los taxis cada vez que Liz los necesitaba, sino que también llegaba a la parada justo en el momento en que aparecía el autobús. Su padre le regaló un trineo por Navidad y a su madrastra le gustó la bufanda de lana que Liz le había hecho. Tampoco perdía nunca a las cartas: la solterona, ¡ve a pescar!, guerra…Si se trataba de juegos de suerte, Liz no perdía nunca.

–¡Otra vez no! –se quejó su madrastra, en el momento en el que Liz le quitaba todos los seises que había ido reuniendo y mostraba sus cartas, con expresión triunfante.

–Tómalo por el lado bueno querida –dijo su padre–. Cuando necesitemos dinero, solo tenemos que mandarla a comprar lotería.

–Solo tengo 10 años –objetó Liz–. No me dejarían comprar nada.

La madre de Beth miro a su hija, que tenía un aspecto tan deprimente como el del East River en un día de lluvia.

–Estoy cansada de jugar a las cartas –dijo la niña.

–¡El monopoly! –dijo el padrastro de Beth con una sonrisa, y fue a buscar el juego–. Yo seré la chistera. Nunca pierdo una partida cuando soy la chistera.

Pero sí que perdió la partida. Ganó Liz, sobre todo gracias a que cayó en las casillas de Boardwalk, Park Place y en todas las estaciones de tren durante su primera vuelta al tablero.

–Que suertuda –dijo su padre.

–Demasiado –murmuró Beth, mientras se marchaba pensando en ello. Desde noviembre, que había estado en el museo, Liz había tenido una suerte inimaginable, más de la que nadie merece. Algo tenía que haber pasado, algo mágico. No era justo. Siempre le pasaban cosas buenas a Liz, mientras que a ella solo le pasaban cosas malas.

Más tarde, Beth retó a Liz a un juego de 'piedra, papel o tijera'. Como era incapaz de decir que no, Liz aceptó. Durante siete veces las dos hermanastras cantaron:

–Una, dos, tres. ¡Ya!

Y las siete veces ganó Liz.

–Eso no es suerte, es magia –le acusó Beth–. Tienes que contarme lo que pasó. Yo también quiero tener suerte.

Liz pensó en mentir, pero no le parecía bien. Beth nunca iba a entrar en contacto con los Meses de Manhattan salvo que ellos quisieran. Y si llegaba a hacerlo, ya sabrían ellos como tratar a una niña de once años, incluso a una tan quejica y molesta como Beth.

Liz le contó a su hermanastra toda la historia, desde cómo se había perdido hasta como había llegado por casualidad a una sala en la que había un cuadro mágico. Le habría contado también todo lo de las Estaciones, pero Beth no tenía ningún interés en oírlo.

–No soy tan tonta –dijo ella–. Y si me lo cuentas todo, se arruinará la magia, ¿a que sí? Te odio, Liz Wallach.

Al día siguiente, en la cena, Beth anunció que su profesor de historia le había mandado el ya famoso trabajo sobre el mobiliario del ala de América. Y tenía que entregarlo el lunes.

–Pero ir al museo en fin de semana es una locura –objetó su madre.

–Podemos hacer una salida familiar –dijo su padrastro–. Será divertido.

Beth hizo una mueca:

–Pero quiero hacerlo yo sola.

–Bien por ti, Bethy –dijo su padrastro–. Todavía podemos hacer de ti toda una neoyorkina. Te diré lo que vamos a hacer: iremos todos al museo y mientras tú vas al ala de América, los demás iremos a mirar armaduras o algo así. Y luego nos encontraremos en la cafetería para comer.

Y eso fue lo que hicieron. Liz, su padre, y la madre de Beth se fueron por un lado y Beth se fue por otro. Nunca le había gustado ir al museo, por lo que enseguida se convirtió en la perfecta protagonista perdida y asustada de un cuento de hadas. Tal y como su madre le había dicho, el museo era una locura. Fuera por donde fuera, la gente le arrollaba y le lanzaba miradas asesinas. Pensando solo en encontrar un lugar tranquilo, subió corriendo una escalera trasera y atravesó una puerta de cristal. Llegó a una sala pequeña y oscura, en la que no había nada más que un cuadro enorme y de colores brillantes.

De lo asustada que estaba, Beth casi no se acordaba de lo que había ido a hacer al museo realmente. Casi, pero no del todo. Se quedó mirando el cuadro, para ver si era mágico. Pero no lo parecía. ¿Qué podía haber de mágico en un grupo de gente de ciudad, reunida alrededor de una estúpida estatua?

–Era una idea estúpida, de todas formas –dijo en voz alta–. Todo el mundo sabe que la magia no existe.

–¿Quién dice eso?

Beth pegó un salto. Una de las personas del cuadro, un chico moreno de su edad, que llevaba unos pantalones holgados y enormes, la estaba mirando con el ceño fruncido. Entonces Beth dijo:

–¿Os acordáis de mi hermanastra, Liz? Estuvo aquí en noviembre y vosotros hicisteis que tuviera suerte siempre.

Al lado de un chico con bermudas había una chica afro-americana con uñas largas y muchas trenzas.

–Noviembre –dijo ella–. Conozco a Noviembre. ¿Es todavía invierno, ahí fuera, en el mundo?

Beth sacudió la cabeza con desprecio.

–¿No se supone que sois mágicos? ¿Y ni siquiera sabéis qué mes es? Para vuestra información, es diciembre. Hace frío y llueve. Lo odio.

–¿Y qué pasa con Navidad? ¿Y la nieve? –preguntó un chico joven que iba en pantalones cortos.

–En Nueva York no nieva. No hay nieve de verdad, como en casa. Se derrite enseguida y se convierte en charcos que te empapan las botas. Y Navidad no es lo mismo sin papá. Odio el invierno aquí, lo odio todo.

–¿Y la primavera? –preguntó un viejo vagabundo que llevaba un montón de chaquetas hechas jirones.

–No hace calor hasta junio. Y luego, enseguida se pone bochornoso. No huele más que a basura y nunca te sientes limpia. Y después vuelve el frio, así sin más. Vuelve a llover, y ni siquiera hay hojas bonitas, como las que había en casa. Lo odio. Odio todo.

Los meses se miraron silenciosamente.

–Bueno –dijo la mujer del chal–. Desde luego, nos has dejado muy claro lo que piensas –su voz sonaba enfadada, con cierta indiferencia.

Beth frunció el ceño:

–Sois vosotros los que habéis preguntado –se quejó–. Así es como me siento. Que le vamos a hacer. Y ahora, ¿qué me vais a hacer? No es justo.

–No te preocupes cariño –dijo una mujer afro-americana que llevaba un vestido de verano–. Te vamos a dar justo lo que necesitas. Y no quiero escuchar ninguno de tus comentarios insolentes Abril.

El chico de los pantalones holgados se encogió de hombros y sonrió.

El anciano de la silla de ruedas, levantando la mano, que parecía una garra blanca, dijo:

–Tienes la suerte que te has buscado. Ahora vete.

Beth sintió como si una mano gigante la estuviera echando de la habitación a empujones. Y siguió empujándola, a derecha e izquierda, a través de la multitud, hasta que estuvo más perdida que antes, si es que eso era posible. La dejó en la esquina más lejana de las artes decorativas europeas, en una sala llena de copas de cristal sucio.

Cuando Beth logró enterarse de por dónde se volvía a la cafetería, ya llegaba casi una hora tarde. Su madre y su padrastro, que habían llegado a pensar que a lo mejor la habían secuestrado, estaban bastante enfadados al verla aparecer sana y salva. Y cuando descubrieron que no había recogido información alguna sobre el mobiliario americano se

enfadaron aún más. Y cuando se le escapó que en realidad no tenía ningún trabajo para el lunes, se enfadaron todavía más, tanto como para enfrentarse a todos los leones del Zoo del Bronx y ganar.

La única persona que no estaba enfadada con Beth era Liz. Al principio, porque pensaba que Beth se merecía tener mala suerte, pero pronto empezó a sentir lástima por ella. Le pasaría a cualquiera.

Beth no conseguía ir por la calle sin pisar algún chicle o una caca de perro. Los semáforos se ponían rojos cuando aparecía por la esquina y los autobuses se marchaban justo cuando llegaba a la parada. Si llovía, el paraguas se le daba la vuelta continuamente y al pasar los taxis, le salpicaban llenándola de barro. Pillaba todos los catarros posibles, en abril se torció el tobillo en clase de ballet y en junio, le tocó el sarampión.

Al principio, tanta mala suerte hizo que Beth se volviera más borde que nunca, en especial hacia Liz, a quien culpaba de haberle arruinado la vida.

–Es bastante horrible –admitió Liz–. Pero estoy segura de que habrá alguna manera de romper la maldición. En los cuentos de hadas normalmente la hay. A lo mejor, te puedes disculpar con los Meses, o intentar compensarles de alguna manera.

–¿Disculparme? –gruñó Beth–. ¿De qué tengo que disculparme? Ellos son los que tienen que disculparse, por hacerme esto a mí. Eres una arrastrada.

Entonces, intentó agarrar la trenza de Liz, pero falló y se cayó de la cama encima de la Casa de los sueños de Barbie, con la cual se arañó muchísimo el brazo y se hizo daño.

–Ay, ¡pobre! –dijo Liz–. Pero no te habría pasado si no hubieras intentado tirarme del pelo. Piénsalo un poco.

Beth se encontraba demasiado mal para responderle en ese momento. Pero tiempo más tarde, cuando los granos del sarampión le picaban a rabiar y ni siquiera su madre quería hacerle compañía, se puso a pensar en lo que le había dicho Liz. ¿Cuáles habían sido las palabras del hombre mayor? *Tienes la suerte que te has buscado*. A lo mejor había ofendido a los Meses. Puede que sí, que junio en Nueva York tuviera algo bueno en lo que no se había fijado.

Miró por la ventana. El cielo estaba despejado y era de un azul turquesa profundo, perfecto para reflejar con toda claridad y brillantez el perfil de los edificios de enfrente. Una paloma se posó en el alfeizar de la ventana con un aleteo de sus alas grises y la miró.

Vale. Puede que junio en Nueva York no fuera tan malo, después de todo.

Después de fijarse en el cielo y la paloma, Beth comenzó a percibir también otras cosas. Se dio cuenta de que su madre continuaba trayéndole comida y libros, incluso después de que los tirara al suelo. Se dio cuenta de que las rocas que Liz le traía de Central Park tenían trocitos de mica que brillaban como diamantes diminutos. También se dio cuenta de que su padrastro siempre entraba a su habitación nada más llegar a casa del trabajo y le contaba que en julio iban a ir todos a Cape Cod y que iban a construir castillos de arena juntos. Y también notó que le gustaba que lo hicieran.

Cuando superó el sarampión y todos se fueron a Cape Cod, ya no odiaba Nueva York ni mucho menos como al principio. Incluso era capaz de encontrar los zapatos del mismo par cuando los necesitaba, los túneles que construía en sus castillos de arena no se hundían y las pulgas de mar picaban a toda la familia, y no solo a ella.

Era magia. Y en otoño, cuando la escuela comenzó, a Beth ya solo le ocurrían pequeñas cosas que podían pasarle a cualquiera, como perder lápices o dejarse los guantes en un taxi. Se llevaba bastante bien con Liz, solía ser amable con su padrastro y, hacía la mayoría de los deberes a tiempo. Probó la comida china y descubrió que le gustaba. De hecho, Beth Dodson se había convertido en una niña bastante buena.

Ese año, el día de Acción de Gracias, Beth y Liz decidieron volver al museo Metropolitano a ver a los doce Meses de Manhattan y darles las gracias. Pero por más que las dos hermanas intentaron perderse, nunca encontraron las escaleras traseras que llevaban a la pequeña y oscura sala en la que no había nada más que un cuadro enorme y de colores brillantes.

5.1.2. Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse

Falada: la yegua de la pastora de ocas

Nancy Farmer

Mis problemas empezaron en el momento en el que la reina del país de los elfos me colocó a Conrad sobre el lomo. Como yegua-hada estaba acostumbrada a llevar jinetes extraños. La reina a menudo me pedía que transportara a huéspedes de la realeza. Bueno, me lo *pedía*, sí, sí. Yo no era uno de esos percherones inútiles. La reina me decía:

–Querida Falada, ¿te importaría dar a este enano (o gnomo, o duende) un tour por los jardines reales?

Y yo le contestaba:

–¡Por supuesto! –a menos que fuera un duende, ya que a algunos les da por mordisquear orejas.

Yo era una yegua preciosa. Mi pelaje era de un color blanco plateado con la crin de color argenta. Mis herraduras doradas estaban aseguradas con clavos de diamante, y cuando galopaba saltaban chispas de mis pezuñas. Justo en el centro de la frente tenía un círculo gris, que es donde me habría crecido un cuerno si hubiera sido un unicornio. De hecho, mi bisabuelo materno era un unicornio.

Así que, como veis, yo no era una yegua de esas cualquiera. Por eso, cuando la reina me puso a Conrad encima sin tan siquiera preguntar, me sentí insultada. Pero primero tengo que hablaros de Conrad. Era un niño humano. De vez en cuando los elfos se llevan a algún bebé que les resulte interesante. Ellos dicen que lo toman prestado, pero para mí eso es robar. Se quedan con el niño hasta que se aburren de él, y luego se lo devuelven a su pobre madre.

Pero para entonces el niño ya ha cogido malos hábitos, pues los elfos lo malcrían todo lo que pueden. Le dan de comer dulces en vez de fruta, nunca lo acuestan a la hora apropiada y ceden cada vez que tiene una rabieta. Y creedme, esos mocosos saben muy bien cómo cogerse un berrinche.

Conrad tenía ocho años y ya no era adorable. La reina estaba cansada de sus ataques de histeria, así que me lo puso sobre el lomo y me dijo:

–Dale una vuelta por el jardín. Pero no le tires, que ya conozco tus trucos.

Estaba molesta conmigo porque la semana pasada había tirado a un par de gnomos sobre un rosal. Yo no entendía cuál era el problema, pues todo el mundo sabe que los gnomos rebotan. Así pues, me fui con Conrad agarrado a mi crin. Tenía los dedos pegajosos de chocolate.

–No te agarres a mí –le dije.

–Intenta impedírmelo –se burló Conrad.

–Los buenos jinetes se sujetan con las rodillas –le expliqué con paciencia.

Entonces Conrad me tiró de la crin con fuerza.

–Podría arrancarte esto –dijo–. Y hacerme una almohada.

–Tú ya tienes almohada –le dije al pequeño monstruo.

–A lo mejor quiero otra –Tiró otra vez, tan fuerte, que en ese momento vi las estrellas. ¡Incluso sentí cómo me arrancaba un mechón de mi hermosa crin! Así que me paré de golpe, di una enorme coz y tiré a Conrad sobre el rosal del jardín que tenía más espinas.

Sus gritos se podían oír hasta en el palacio del rey de los duendes, que estaba en las montañas. Solo sangraba por una docena de sitios, más o menos, pero la reina estaba furiosa.

–Estoy harta del ruido que hay aquí –dijo ella sollozando–. Tú, Falada, serás enviada a realizar una misión entre los humanos. Si lo haces bien, puede que considere dejarte volver. Y tú, Conrad, te vas directo con tu madre.

Me entraron ganas de vomitar. Me estaban desterrando del país de los elfos. De vez en cuando, algún animal-hada tenía que realizar una misión en el mundo real. De ahí es de donde vienen todos esos zorros mágicos, pájaros de fuego y peces que pueden hablar. Y la misión siempre es desagradable.

Un elfo aristócrata me puso una cuerda alrededor del cuello y me llevó por la carretera neblinosa que lleva al mundo real. Lo primero que noté fue cómo rechinaba la suciedad bajo mis pezuñas. Después, sentí mi primera picadura de tábano. El sol calentaba demasiado, el césped estaba muy seco y el agua llena de barro.

Me vi reflejada en un arroyo. Mis herraduras doradas habían desaparecido, y mi pelo plateado se había vuelto de color gris. ¡Pobre de mí! No era más que una vulgar yegua de tiro sarnosa de una granja de ganado.

Mi tarea consistía en llevar a la princesa Belinda al reino vecino para presentársela a su futuro marido.

–Cuida de ella –me susurró la madre de Belinda, que sabía que yo era una yegua-hada–. Es una niña muy dulce, pero un poco tonta –y con un suspiro añadió–. Supongo que la he mimado demasiado.

Cuando vi a Belinda se me cayó el alma a los pies. Era una niña guapa e inocente. Tanto, que lloró cuando un pájaro llegó volando al jardín y se llevó un saltamontes.

–Haz algo –dijo llorando y retorciéndose las manos.

–Ya, ya pasó –dijo la reina–. Ese pájaro solo le está llevando comida a sus bebés.

Nos pusimos en marcha. Yo avanzaba con cuidado con la princesa Belinda subida a la grupa y detrás de mí venía un hermoso caballo negro con Dagmar, la doncella de Belinda. Belinda aplaudía cada vez que veía algo nuevo, pues todo era maravilloso para ella. Le gustaban los árboles y las ardillas que nos hacían ruiditos desde los árboles; y todas las flores la llenaban de alegría.

Dagmar, por el contrario, lo odiaba todo. Pensaba que las ardillas solo servían para hacer pastel de ardilla y que los árboles habría que cortarlos para hacer hogueras.

–Seguro que este bosque está lleno de osos –resopló.

–¡Cómo me gustaría ver un osito amoroso y achucharle! ¿Es verdad que beben miel? –preguntó Belinda.

–Se comen a las personas y beben sangre –le contestó Dagmar.

Oído esto, Belinda se calló durante un rato, pero pronto empezó a canturrear otra vez. Todo era nuevo para ella, ya sabéis. Era una niña buena y alegre.

Cuando llegamos al primer arroyo, la princesa Belinda dijo:

–Querida Dagmar, ¿me podrías traer un vaso de agua?

–Vete tú. No eres coja –contestó Dagmar.

–No dejes que se salga con la suya –le dije a Belinda–. Algún día serás reina. Tienes que aprender a dar órdenes.

Pero la niña estaba demasiado asustada, así que descabalgó y se fue a por su agua.

Más tarde llegamos a otro arroyo.

–Queridísima Dagmar, ¿te importaría muchísimo traerme un vaso de agua? –dijo la princesa Belinda.

–Pues claro que me importa muchísimo –le dijo Dagmar.

Así pues, la princesa volvió a descabalgar y fue a buscar su propia agua.

Esa noche, Dagmar se negó a cocinar, a lavar los platos y a hacer las camas. Cada vez, yo le decía a la princesa:

–No dejes que se salga con la suya.

Y cada vez, Belinda se retorcía las manos y lloraba.

Llegó un momento en el que me rendí y me uní al caballo negro, que se encontraba debajo de un árbol.

–Las cosas no van nada bien –murmuré para mis adentros.

–Las cosas van justo como tienen que ir –replicó el caballo negro.

Me quedé asombrada. ¡Otro caballo que hablaba!

–¿Eres del país de los elfos? –le pregunté.

–No. Mi señora y yo venimos del palacio del rey de los duendes, que está en las montañas.

Así que eso lo explicaba todo. Dagmar era un duende. No era de extrañar, entonces, que fuera borde y malhumorada.

Por la mañana, Dagmar obligó a Belinda a vestirse con unos harapos, en vez de con su precioso vestido dorado, y le embadurnó toda la cara y el pelo de barro.

–¡Ya está! Nadie sabrá que eres una princesa. Si me delatas, te haré picadillo. Y si me delatas tú, Falada, haré que te corten la cabeza.

Ni Belinda ni yo dudamos de su amenaza ni por un segundo.

Dagmar se puso el vestido dorado. Cuando llegamos al reino vecino, salieron a recibirnos el anciano rey y su hijo Humbert. El príncipe Humbert estaba encantado con Dagmar.

–Eres más hermosa de lo que me esperaba –gritó.

–Y tú eres más tonto de lo que esperaba –le dijo Dagmar con una dulce sonrisa. Pero al príncipe Humbert ni siquiera le importaba que le hubiera insultado. Se había enamorado de ella locamente. Era el tipo de príncipe al que le gustaba que le mangonearan.

–¿Qué debemos hacer con tu dama de servicio? –preguntó el anciano rey.

–¡Ah, ésta! Es tan tonta que solo sirve para cuidar rebaños de ocas –dijo Dagmar con desprecio.

Así pues, a Belinda se la llevaron a una granja de ocas, y a mí me encadenaron a la rueda de un molino. Dando vueltas y más vueltas, caminaba con fatiga, moliendo grano para convertirlo en harina. Se me dañaron las pezuñas de tanto caminar, tenía la cola toda

enredada y áspera y se me empezaron a marcar los huesos en mi sucia y polvorienta piel. Estaba mucho peor que una yegua de tiro sarnosa en una granja de ganado.

Todos los días Belinda pasaba con un rebaño de ocas. Con ella – no me lo podía creer – iba Conrad, el niño que me había metido en líos en su momento. Su madre le había mandado a la granja de ocas a trabajar.

–Hola Falada. Tienes una pinta terrible –dijo el pequeño monstruo con una sonrisa.

–*Ocas, ocas, silbad y luchad. Que a Conrad un terrible mordisco tenéis que dar* –dije cantando. Puede que me hubieran desterrado, pero todavía era un yegua-hada y sabía algo de magia. Las ocas batieron las alas y mordieron el trasero de Conrad. El niño se marchó corriendo y gritando lo suficientemente alto para que le oyeran en el palacio del rey de los duendes, que estaba en las montañas.

–Pobre Falada, pareces tan triste –suspiró la princesa Belinda.

–Tú también –le dije.

–*Ay, ay, si madre supiera, temo que su corazón en dos se rompiera* –dijo la princesa–. Será mejor que lleve a estas ocas a la pradera antes de que se metan en más problemas.

Y siguió andando con ellas, guiándolas con una pequeña vara de sauce.

A medida que el tiempo pasaba, comencé a notar un cambio en Belinda. Ya no se retorcía las manos ni lloraba. De hecho, Belinda estaba aprendiendo muchas cosas importantes del granjero y de su mujer. Ahora sabía hornear pan y cultivar verduras. Sabía esquilar ovejas y coger el huevo de una gallina sin que la picaran. Cuantas más cosas aprendía, más segura de sí misma se volvía Belinda.

Belinda pasaba todos los días por delante del molino y me traía un puñado de zanahorias o una manzana. A cambio, yo le enseñé a librarse de Conrad. El niño tenía la costumbre de arrancarle mechones de su largo y dorado cabello para hacer anzuelos de pesca. Pero ahora, cuando él se le acercaba, ella cantaba:

–*Sopla, viento, con todo tu poder, para el sombrero de Conrad dejar de ver*.

Y Conrad se pasaba el resto de la tarde corriendo detrás del sombrero por toda la pradera.

Sin embargo, un día, Conrad tuvo suficiente y se enfadó. Esperó fuera, junto a la puerta trasera del palacio hasta que el anciano rey salió al jardín a tomar un poco el sol.

–¡Señor! ¡Señor! –le llamó el muchacho–. ¡Por favor, escúcheme señor!

El anciano rey tenía doce hijos y le gustaban los niños, así que le dijo amablemente:

–Ven aquí muchacho. ¿Qué te pasa?

–Es esa asquerosa pastora de ocas –le dijo Conrad–. Todos los días hace un truco de magia, y mi sombrero sale volando por la pradera. Y también habla con un caballo, ¡y el caballo le contesta! Creo que es una bruja, señor.

–Vaya, vaya. Con que un caballo que habla. Eso hay que verlo –le contestó el anciano rey.

A la mañana siguiente, temprano, el rey fue hasta el molino y se sentó en una roca. Iba vestido de granjero, pero yo sabía exactamente quién era. Uno no crece en el país de los elfos sin aprender a distinguir a un rey de alguien que no lo es.

Enseguida llegó Belinda con su rebaño de ocas. Conrad no paraba de saltar, lleno de alegría. Había visto al anciano rey en la roca.

–Pobre Falada, pareces tan triste –susurró la princesa.

–Tú también –le contesté.

–Ay, ay, si madre supiera, temo que su corazón en dos se rompiera.

En ese momento no pude resistir la tentación y canté:

–Ocas, ocas, silbad y luchad. Que a Conrad un terrible mordisco tenéis que dar.

Inmediatamente, las ocas batieron sus alas y mordieron el trasero de Conrad, que salió corriendo y gritando tan alto como para que le oyeran en el palacio del rey de los duendes, que estaba en las montañas.

El anciano rey se echó a reír a carcajadas, tanto que casi se cae de la roca.

–Eso es algo que no se ve todos los días –dijo jadeando–. Venga, venga, vosotras dos. Contadme cómo una yegua-hada y una pastora de ocas de lo más inusual han acabado en mi jardín trasero.

Pero tanto Belinda como yo teníamos miedo de hablar. Sabíamos que el príncipe Humbert estaba casado con un duende, y ni Belinda quería ser cortada en pedazos, ni yo quería perder la cabeza.

–Bueno, señor, es un poco difícil de explicar –comencé yo.

–Prometimos no decir nada –añadió Belinda.

El anciano rey nos miró.

–Ya veo que tenéis miedo. Vaya. Pues no sé qué podemos hacer al respecto.

De repente Belinda se estiró y dijo:

–Estoy cansada de ser una cobarde. He pasado noches enteras despierta cuando las ovejas han estado enfermas. He llevado a los caballos al establo en medio de tormentas espantosas. Ellos sí que estaban asustados, pero yo no tenía tiempo para estarlo.

–Has hablado como una verdadera princesa –dijo el anciano rey sonriendo.

Entonces Belinda le contó todo lo que había pasado durante el viaje por el bosque y cómo la duende le había obligado a cambiarse de ropa. El anciano rey se levantó de golpe lleno de ira. Se marchó dando zancadas hacia el palacio, llamando a los guardias, a sus soldados y a su verdugo.

Pero cuando llegó al palacio, Dagmar ya no estaba. Con esa manera que tienen los duendes de saber cuándo huir, Dagmar había ensillado su hermoso caballo negro y había huido a las montañas lo más rápido que pudo. Ah, y también se había llevado al príncipe Humbert, pues aún estaba enamorado de ella, independientemente de que fuera un duende o no. Además, le gustaba la manera en que ella le mangoneaba.

En su lugar, la princesa Belinda se casó con su hermano pequeño, el príncipe Herkimer. Era el segundo en la línea al trono y tenía mucho mejor carácter.

Y a mí me permitieron volver al país de los elfos. Nada más cruzar la frontera, mis agrietadas pezuñas se volvieron suaves de nuevo, mi pelo cambió de gris a plateado y volví a tener una piel lisa y tupida.

–Es genial estar de vuelta –suspiré.

Cuando llegué al palacio de la reina, vi que tenía visita. Se trataba de Dagmar, el príncipe Humbert y ese caballo negro tan condenadamente guapo. Dagmar también había cambiado al cruzar la frontera del país de los elfos. Ahora parecía exactamente un duende, lo que quiere decir que lucía un color verde guisante y tenía un magnífico par de colmillos a cada lado de la nariz.

–Las cosas salieron bien después de todo –le dije al caballo negro.

–Bueno, por supuesto –resopló–. Tu trabajo era llevar a la princesa a su nuevo reino. El mío era hacer que tuviera algo de sentido común antes de convertirse en reina. No eras la única a la que le habían dado una misión.

Y así, nos marchamos del jardín juntos antes de que nadie pudiera pedirnos que le diéramos una vuelta.

5.1.3.Becoming Charise

Charise quiere crecer

Kathe Koja

En la parte trasera del autobús, con la cabeza agachada junto a una ventana sucia y empañada de vaho, estaba Charise, con un cuaderno de dibujo abierto sobre las rodillas. Otra vez iba sola, como siempre, imaginando el mundo.

–¡Eh! ¡Frikeinstein! –dijo Tibb Gleason, dándole un golpe en el hombro, que hizo que se saliera de la línea que estaba trazando–. Haz un dibujo de esto.

Charise se mordió la lengua, borró la marca y empezó a dibujar otra vez. No dibujaba el mundo que había a su alrededor tal y como era, sino su propio mundo, como ella se imaginaba que podría llegar a ser. Un mundo en el que nadie le hacía daño a los animales, ni contaminaba el agua o la atmósfera. Un mundo en el que nadie hacía daño a otras personas, ni les llamaba por nombres ofensivos. Un mundo en el que las chicas podían llevar jerséis anchos y rojos con la cara de Albert Einstein sin que les acusaran de ser empollonas o frikis, o cosas peores. Todo el tiempo.

Charise se preguntaba si a Einstein le habrían llamado empollón.

Había leído todo lo que había podido encontrar sobre Albert Einstein: que a los doce años había decidido resolver el enigma del 'gran mundo' que le rodeaba, que era un estudiante terrible, que había dejado la escuela a los quince años, y que los cuatro trabajos científicos que había escrito habían servido para resolver ese enigma más de lo que nadie había hecho hasta entonces y desde entonces. Charise pensaba que era algo así como un santo. Un santo del conocimiento, si es que existía tal cosa. A Charise le encantaba aprender cosas, cómo funcionaban las cosas y para qué servían. Sabía que el Saber era el primer paso antes de Crecer.

–Quiero Crecer. Saber qué voy a ser –le dijo a la tía Tamara. El desayuno, las ventanas aún oscuras, el bizcocho de chocolate y el zumo de naranja con ese color fluorescente en su vaso. Debajo de la silla, su terrier, Dino, esperaba a que le cayeran las migas de siempre.

La tía Tamara se sirvió un poco de zumo de naranja y cortó un trozo de bizcocho con un movimiento rápido.

–¿Ser qué? Podrías ser artista, con todos esos dibujos que haces. O tal vez científica. O incluso ingeniera…

–No me refiero a eso –la interrumpió Charise–. Quiero decir… Solo quiero Crecer.

Crecer para ser yo, le gustaría haber dicho. Pero no sabía cómo explicarlo. De la misma manera que una oruga es una mariposa, en su interior, en sus genes: igual que un átomo que se divide. Igual que un trozo de papel y un lápiz del dos son un dibujo cuando se unen una mano especial y un ojo. Cuando todo ello finalmente se junta, para Ser lo que de algún modo ya era desde el principio, y serlo para siempre. La tía Tamara la miraba sonriendo.

–¿Quieres más bizcocho?

Dino levantó sus orejitas puntiagudas, pero Charise sacudió la cabeza.

–Tengo que irme.

–Te veré después del trabajo –dijo la tía Tamara.

En el autobús, Charise tuvo que pasar apretujándose a través de un grupo de chicas mayores de primero de la ESO que llevaban abrigos de color rosa y verde fosforito. En primero de la ESO había un tema sobre Einstein en clase de ciencias. Eso era algo que esperaba con ganas, como una luz radiante frente a la monotonía diaria. Tal vez sería diferente si estuviera en cualquier otro sitio, en cualquier otro camino. Pero decir que Jackson era una escuela era como decir que un sándwich de queso era una comida: servía para ir tirando, pero eso era todo. No era una pizza de pepperoni picante, como, por ejemplo, el Instituto Bayley. Charise había oído hablar de Bayley, ya que un par de chicos de Jackson - muy listos y suertudos - habían ido. En su mente, esa escuela era como la luna, brillante e inalcanzable, algo con lo que soñar por las noches.

Pero hoy había zumo de naranja y bizcocho, y el autobús y los pasillos de Jackson, llenos de empujones, donde tenía que intentar no preocuparse por no tener compañero de taquilla y simplemente superar el día.

A Charise siempre le había costado mucho encajar. Era demasiado rebelde para los chicos listos, pero demasiado lista para los chicos rebeldes, como si la escuela fuera una especie de puzle, y ella una pieza de otra caja. La tía Tamara solía preguntarle muchas veces, cuando estaba sentada tomándose una Coca-Cola o unas galletas, con las piernas enganchadas en las patas de la silla de la cocina, ¿no quieres salir a la calle a jugar? Dino, mientras tanto, se mantenía siempre alerta. ¿No quieres que venga algún amigo?

No tengo amigos, solía contestar ella en su cabeza. A la tía Tamara, sin embargo, le contestaba:

–Hoy no.

O bien:

–Ahora mismo no.

En la escuela primaria la mayoría de los niños parecían tontos y un poco bebés. De todas formas, no era plato de buen gusto quedarse a un lado y ver cómo los demás jugaban al fútbol, a las cuatro esquinas o se iban juntos después del colegio. Ella tenía la esperanza de que algún día las cosas cambiarían.

–Espera un poco –le decía siempre la tía Tamara–. Las cosas cambiarán, ya lo verás.

Pero seguían siendo igual. Y la sensación de soledad también era igual, un dolor oscuro y profundo, no en el corazón sino más profundo, como si fuera una chimenea y el vacío que hay antes del final fuera también parte de ese dolor.

Simplemente soy diferente, se decía a sí misma Charise mientras se mordía el labio. Seguro que Einstein también era diferente.

En Jackson había tres grupos de niños distintos. El más grande era el de los Del Montón: los que estaban en el centro, que adelantaban a Charise entre la corriente de gente de los pasillos, como si fueran botes alrededor de una boya, evitándola sin ningún esfuerzo y sin siquiera ver que estaba allí. En el comedor, agachada sobre su cuaderno de dibujo al final de la mesa de los chicos que no eran populares, donde Clarissa, DeeDee y DeJuan jugaban a partidas interminables de cartas, a Corazones o al Bump Rummy, alguna vez escuchaba cómo alguno de los Del Montón la llamaba para hacer reír a los demás y gritaban:

–¡Eh! ¡Frikeinstein!

Era cruel, pero no demasiado cruel en la manera en que podían usar una lupa para quemar hormigas en la acera, sin pensar que podría ser doloroso para las hormigas.

Pero los chicos que sí pensaban, los chicos listos, siempre estaban ocupados con cosas como la representación de los estudiantes, el periódico escolar o el grupo de debate. Eran cosas que Charise no quería hacer. Y, de todas formas, ellos no querían pasar el rato con ella tampoco. La respetaban por su inteligencia, pero eso era todo. El respeto es diferente a la amistad: se puede respetar a alguien que ni siquiera te cae bien.

El tercer grupo eran los conflictivos o chicos rebeldes como Tibb Gleason. Siempre se sentaban en la parte trasera de la clase, haciendose risitas entre ellos y escribiendo palabrotas en sus libros, o en las mesas para que otros chicos se las encontraran después. Siempre ignoraban a Charise excepto cuando necesitaban la respuesta a alguna pregunta y luego la insultaban, si no les contestaba. Lo cual no hacía nunca.

–¿Queréis saber la respuesta? –les susurraba ella, muy bajito para que sus labios no se movieran mucho y el profesor no la viera–. Pues estudiad.

¿Por qué tenían que beneficiarse esos tipos de todo lo que ella trabajaba? Todas las noches se llevaba libros a casa, iba a la biblioteca y se metía en internet en el ordenador de la tía Tamara.

–¿Qué estás haciendo? –le preguntaba la tía Tamara desde el salón, donde estaba sentada con sus propios libros y los deberes de sus clases de adultos–. ¿Estás en internet?

–Me estoy descargando algunas cosas –le respondía Charise–. Para el colegio.

La mayoría no era para el colegio, sino para ella. Eran cosas sobre las que quería aprender, pero a la tía Tamara no le importaba. Decía que aprender era aprender. El Sr. Mahfouz decía lo mismo.

El Sr. Mahfouz era el profesor de ciencias de sexto de primaria. Algunos chicos le llamaban Sr. Mah'ara, pero a la mayoría de los chicos les caía bien. Contaba chistes, traía juegos de láser y muelles gigantes. No le importaba si se reían o si gritaban. A veces llevaba camisetas divertidas debajo de la cazadora, o una gorra de béisbol con un número, de algún equipo deportivo que le gustara. Todos los deportes suponían otro mundo para Charise, pero el Sr. Mahfouz hablaba sobre la física del béisbol. Era capaz de encontrar la ciencia en cualquier cosa, incluso en la tele.

–Vuestra misión –le dijo a la clase ese día–, es encontrar la ciencia en la televisión. O en un televisor. Abridlo, diseccionadlo y ved con qué os encontráis. Después me lo contáis todo en un ensayo. Como mínimo cinco páginas, y por lo menos tres ilustraciones. Eso quiere decir imágenes, chicos.

La mayoría de los chicos vio documentales sobre la naturaleza, y algunos alquilaron videos y los trajeron a clase. Mark Carver, el editor del periódico escolar, escribió un artículo en el periódico, con tres fotografías de él y sus amigos 'diseccionando' un televisor con un destornillador. Charise hizo su ensayo sobre la ciencia de la televisión, qué hacía que funcionara y por qué veías una imagen cuando apretabas un botón del mando.

–Esto es dinamita –dijo el Sr. Mahfouz, y puso el ensayo en la vitrina del frente de la clase–. Charise, ven a verme después de clase.

–Dinamítate Frikeinstein –dijo Tibb Gleason cuando Charise se volvió a sentar.

A la hora de la salida, fue a ver al Sr. Mahfouz, que estaba en su escritorio, ordenando papeles. Se oía cómo los estudiantes cerraban las taquillas de un golpe, y algún grito lejano en el pasillo. La escuela se quedó en silencio mientras esperaba. Finalmente, el Sr. Mahfouz le dijo:

–Ya he acabado –y dejando los papeles a un lado continuó–. Perdona que haya tardado tanto… Sabes, tu ensayo era excelente. De verdad. Incluso para ti.

Charise asintió cuidadosamente. Sabía que había más.

–¿Te gusta estar aquí? ¿En Jackson?

¿Le gustaba? ¿Qué clase de pregunta era esa?

–La razón por la que te lo pregunto –dijo–, es porque han salido un par de plazas en Bayley; el Instituto Bayley. ¿Sabes algo de este centro? El caso es que me gustaría recomendarte para una de ellas.

De entre los papeles de su escritorio, cogió dos, junto con un folleto que estaba lleno de ilustraciones, como si fuera una revista.

–Llévate esto a casa, deja que tus padres le echen un vistazo y, si estás interesada, seguimos hablando.

El Instituto Bayley de Artes y Ciencias. El folleto estaba escrito con letras negras y estilizadas en un fondo de color azul pálido y contenía miles de cosas sobre la excelencia académica y un mundo de aprendizaje. También tenía muchas imágenes, con niños en el laboratorio, niños en un escenario y niños con ordenadores, muchos ordenadores. Esto no era un sándwich de queso. Era una pizza enorme y deliciosa con todo, el tipo de sitio que a Einstein le habría encantado.

Charise escondió el folleto en su mochila, como si alguien fuera a quitárselo o fuera a desaparecer en el aire como si de un truco de magia se tratara. Lo leyó como si fuera la Biblia; lo leyó durante una semana entera, mirando a los niños, los laboratorios y los ordenadores de las fotografías.

Me gustaría recomendarte…

Adiós a Tibb Gleason. Ya nadie la llamaría frikeinstein.

Un mundo de aprendizaje…

La tía Tamara tenía que decir que sí.

Hasta que, por fin, el viernes durante la cena, tratando de sonar como si no fuera realmente importante, dijo:

–Del Sr. Mahfouz –Charise dejó el folleto sobre la mesa–. Dijo que te lo enseñara, que él me recomendaría si yo quería.

Con el tenedor en la mano, era incapaz de comer, de tragar y apenas podía respirar mientras veía cómo la tía Tamara lo leía entero, incluso las hojas de dentro. Dino se removió inquieto debajo de la silla, y la cena se enfrió. Finalmente, la tía Tamara levantó la mirada, pero no sonreía.

–Cielo –dijo con una voz que sonaba como el plomo–, tan lista como eres, no estoy segura de que este sea el lugar para ti. Los chicos serían muy diferentes a lo que estás acostumbrada.

Charise sintió cómo le latía el corazón, igual que un tambor duro y sangriento; como un átomo dividiéndose. Abrió la boca, pero la tía Tamara seguía hablando.

–…al otro lado de la ciudad sin ningún autobús escolar que te lleve hasta allí y yo tengo que estar en el trabajo a las…

Como si le saliera desde dentro del tambor, del átomo, la voz de Charise sonó seca y lejana:

–Podría ir en bici.

–Está al otro lado de la ciudad, Charise. ¿Qué pasaría en invierno?

–Podría…Podría coger un autobús normal, o podría ir caminando…

Pero la tía Tamara estaba sacudiendo la cabeza. Mientras cerraba el folleto, le dijo:

–Charise, cariño, lo siento mucho…

Pero Charise ya se había marchado, dando un portazo, a su habitación. Se acurrucó en el suelo, con los brazos alrededor del cuerpo, hasta que se volvió oscura, fuerte y pequeña, como una roca o una semilla. Estaba llorando, pero no se dio cuenta.

Quiero Crecer. Quiero Crecer.

Iría en bici, cogería un autobús, caminaría todos los kilómetros de ida y vuelta si era necesario. Iría a Bayley, sería como Einstein, sería…

–¿Charise?

Dura y fuerte. Le dolían los brazos; se le habían dormido las piernas. La llamada de la tía Tamara fue tan suave como su voz:

–Charise, por favor, abre la puerta.

–No.

Entonces supo que estaba llorando, al sentir como las lágrimas le corrían por la cara. Sintió su sabor salado y su calor; sus elementos, habría dicho el Sr. Mahfouz. Lloró hasta que sintió que se quedaba vacía, y luego lloró un poco más. La puerta se abrió una rendija y entró Dino, que fue a tumbarse a su lado en la oscuridad. Todavía estaba llorando cuando, por fin, se quedó dormida.

–Tu tía me ha llamado –dijo el Sr. Mahfouz en el momento en el que vio a Charise entrando en clase. Parecía triste–. ¿Puedes quedarte después de clase un momento?

–Claro.

Nada de lágrimas hoy, se prometió Charise. Puso cara de póquer y metió las manos en los bolsillos, mientras el Sr. Mahfouz le decía que su tía había dicho esto y aquello y lo otro. Mientras hablaba, el profesor la miraba a la cara.

–Tengo que decirte que estoy bastante decepcionado –dijo finalmente dejándose caer en la silla–. ¿Tú no?

Estaba cansado, parecía un balón de helio el día después de la fiesta, como si le hubieran quitado algo bueno.

–Sí... Un poco –contestó Charise, y encogiéndose ligeramente de hombros añadió–. ¿Pero y qué?

–Bueno, supongo que tú y yo tendremos que hacer todo lo que podamos –suspiró el Sr. Mahfouz–. ¿Conoces la historia del patito feo?

Ella asintió bruscamente, sintiendo el peso de su corazón en su interior. Solo quería que dejara de hablar para poder coger el abrigo y marcharse, salir de esta escuela tan cutre, al menos por hoy. Pero el Sr. Mahfouz estaba esperando una respuesta.

–Sí… –dijo mirando por la ventana, al gris del sol de la tarde, para no mirarle a él–. Creció y se convirtió en un cisne. ¿Y qué pasa?

–Que nunca había sido un patito –dijo el Sr. Mahfouz. Su voz sonaba tranquila y concluyente, igual que cuando explicaba algo que esperaba que ellos entendieran, que ella entendiera–. Se iba a convertir en un cisne. Sin importar lo que hiciera o donde fuera, estaba en su ADN, Charise. ¿Entiendes lo que estoy diciendo?

–Entiendo –contestó.

Todavía quería marcharse, y deseaba estar en su habitación, y encontrar a Einstein para contarle sus problemas, y contarle lo mucho que deseaba poder convertirse en lo que estaba destinada a ser, lo que era en su interior –

un cisne.

De la misma manera que un lápiz y un trozo de papel es un dibujo, y una oruga es una mariposa. De la misma manera que ella era lo que era, Charise era parte de un puzle, pero no era el puzle que conocía, sino una pieza de algo más grande: un puzle diferente, en otro sitio. Tal vez en Bayley, pero tal vez no. ¿Qué importaba? Al final, probablemente, eso era lo de menos.

Estaba en su ADN, Charise. ¿Entiendes lo que estoy diciendo?

–¿Charise? –preguntó el Sr. Mahfouz, inclinándose hacia delante con los brazos sobre la mesa.

–Sí –dijo la niña.

Ahora lo entendía. Entendía por qué sonreía el profesor; ella también sonreía. No era una sonrisa enorme, pero sí resplandeciente, como una pequeña luna que estaba a un millón de kilómetros de distancia, haciéndose más grande a medida que uno se acercaba a ella.

–¿Sabes? –dijo el Sr. Mahfouz–. Siempre puedes intentarlo al año que viene. Entrar en Bayley, me refiero. Puede que tu tía…

–Einstein dejó la escuela –dijo Charise. Ahora su sonrisa era más burlona.

El Sr. Mahfouz se rio y le dijo:

–No tienes que hacer todo lo que hizo Einstein.

En el autobús, Tibb Gleason intentó hacerle la zancadilla en el pasillo, pero Charise pasó por encima, como si no pasara nada; cuac, cuac, pensó. Que te graznen, Tibb Gleason. Dejándose caer sobre el asiento, sacó su cuaderno de dibujo y pasó el camino a casa dibujando el mundo que quería, el 'gran mundo' de Einstein, y a ella misma, de mayor, con unas alas enormes y blancas como las de los cisnes.

5.1.4. The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Las doce princesas bailarinas

Patricia A. McKillip

Hace mucho tiempo, en un país muy lejano, un joven soldado, que volvía caminando a casa de una batalla en la que había luchado en nombre del rey, se encontró perdido en el bosque. El camino por el que iba fue desapareciendo, hasta que se vio de pie entre árboles silenciosos, con el sol poniéndose a su espalda y la luna saliendo delante de él. Solo y perdido, entre la noche y el día, pensó para sí mismo: hay cosas peores.

Había visto muchas en el campo de batalla. Él estaba solo porque había visto morir a su mejor amigo y le había dado sus últimas monedas a otro soldado que intentaba llegar a casa caminando con una sola pierna. Pero él, aunque agotado y ensangrentado por la batalla, todavía tenía todos los huesos, sus ojos, e incluso aún le quedaba algo de pan y queso en el morral para comer. Se sentó junto a una maraña de raíces de árboles, desde donde podía ver la luna, y sacó su humilde comida. Acababa de abrir la boca para dar el primer bocado cuando a su lado una voz dijo:

–Un bocado es un banquete para quienes no tienen nada.

Se volvió, preguntándose quién habría podido acercarse tan silenciosamente como para sentarse a su lado sin que se le notara. Era una mujer muy mayor. Los huesos se le marcaban bajo la piel morena y envejecida, como las raíces de los árboles bajo la tierra. Sus ojos pálidos, que ahora solo mantenían un remedo del azul del que habían sido, estaban fijos en la rebanada de pan y el trozo de queso que el soldado sujetaba en la mano. Suspiró, porque tenía mucha hambre, pero ella también debía de estar hambrienta, de tanto correr entre los árboles como un animal, sin nadie que se preocupara por ella. Hay cosas peores, pensó, que tener un poco menos de algo.

Entonces, partió el pan y el queso en dos y le dio la mitad diciendo:

–Entonces tengamos un banquete los dos.

–Eres muy amable, joven soldado –dijo con voz temblorosa, justo antes de dar un mordisco a su escasa comida, como si esta fuera a desaparecer antes de que pudiera acabársela. Cuando terminó de tragar hasta el último trozo y después de rebuscar por si había caído alguna miga, volvió a hablar.

–¿Cómo te llamas?

–Val, de Valentín –respondió él.

–Un buen nombre para un soldado. ¿Habéis ganado la batalla?

Val se encogió de hombros.

–Eso dicen. Desde donde yo estaba, no podría decir si ganar era mucho mejor que perder.

–¿Y ahora qué vas a hacer?

–No lo sé. Mi hermano pequeño se ha casado y se ha hecho cargo de la granja familiar y de nuestros padres mientras yo estaba en la guerra. Encontraré el camino a casa para que vean que sigo vivo y luego buscaré algo que hacer en el mundo. Después de todo, quien no tiene nada, tampoco tiene nada que perder.

–Tienes una cara bonita y honesta –le dijo la mujer mayor–. Eso es mucho.

Sus pálidos ojos se iluminaron con la luz de la luna y brillaron de una manera tan repentina y extraña que el muchacho se sobresaltó.

–¿Te gustaría ser rey?

Val se tragó una carcajada junto a un trozo de pan.

–Mejor que mendigo.

–En ese caso sigue este camino que cruza a través del bosque. Te llevará al reino de al lado. Allí, el rey y la reina están desesperados buscando ayuda. Tienen doce hermosas hijas…

–¡Doce!

–Ninguna de ellas quiere casarse. Se ríen de todos los pretendientes. El rey las encierra todas las noches en su habitación, y por la mañana las encuentra durmiendo tan profundamente que no se despiertan hasta el mediodía. Al pie de cada una de las camas hay siempre un par de zapatillas de satén destrozadas de tanto bailar, tan destrozadas que hay que tirarlas. Pero nadie sabe cómo consiguen escapar de su habitación las princesas, ni a dónde van a bailar. El rey ha prometido su reino y a una de sus hijas al hombre que pueda resolver este misterio, sea quien sea.

–Sea quien sea –repitió Val, y sintió algo parecido al asombro en su corazón, donde antes no había nada–. Incluso yo.

–Incluso tú. Pero tienes que tener cuidado. El rey está medio loco por la preocupación y el miedo que le causan sus hijas. Matará a todo el que fracase, incluso a príncipes que algún día pudieran casarse con sus hijas.

El joven soldado lo sopesó.

–Bueno –dijo suavemente–, ya me he enfrentado antes a la muerte. Nadie me ha ofrecido nunca hacerme rey si sobrevivía.

Entonces, se levantó y continuó:

–Hay suficiente claridad esta noche para ver el camino. ¿Dónde está el camino que lleva al reino?

–Bajo tus pies –contestó ella.

Y allí estaba, lleno de luz y serpenteando entre los árboles. Val se quedó mirando a la mujer mayor, cuya cara se llenó de arrugas al sonreírle.

–Dos cosas. Una: no bebas nada que te ofrezcan las princesas. Dos: esto te hará invisible cuando las sigas por la noche –dijo tocando la polvorienta capa que llevaba en la espalda.

Y mientras él se colocaba el morral sobre el hombro, añadió–. Ser amable con viejas ancianas tiene su recompensa.

–Eso espero –dijo tomando aliento, y dio un paso sobre el camino iluminado por la luna, mientas se preguntaba si al final del camino encontraría la muerte, o el amor.

La muerte, pensó inmediatamente cuando conoció al padre de las doce princesas. El rey, que apareció vestido de terciopelo negro y cota de malla plateada, era alto y estaba demacrado. Tenía el pelo largo y gris plomo, la cara delgada y el ceño fruncido. Sus ojos eran negros y rezumaban angustia y frustración. También llevaba una espada muy larga y pesada, que colgada del cinturón de Val arrastraría por el suelo. Siempre mantenía una mano apoyada en ella, y Val se preguntó si la utilizaba para matar a los príncipes que fracasaban.

No obstante, le habló al joven soldado con cortesía. Al punto Val se encontró disfrutando de los placeres de un baño aromático mientras un barbero le cortaba el pelo. Después se vistió con ropa refinada y elegante, pero sin dar demasiadas explicaciones se negó a quitarse la capa, raída y polvorienta. Le ofrecieron una comida, tan elaborada que apenas podía nombrar lo que comió. Cuando cayó la noche, el rey le llevó hasta la alcoba de las princesas.

Las puertas de la gran alcoba se abrieron y dejaron a la vista tal colorido, tal exuberancia de madera y telas, tal movimiento de manos esbeltas y enjoyadas, cabellos resplandecientes, ojos brillantes y curiosos, y tantas voces dulces y divertidas, que Val se quedó paralizado en la entrada, mudo del asombro, al comprobar que un lugar tan encantador y lleno de elegancia pudiera existir en el mundo que él conocía.

–Hijas mías –dijo el rey al tiempo que ellas se le acercaban, atravesando el aire como cisnes envueltas en sueltos camisones de encaje–. La reina les puso nombres de flores. Aster, Bluet, Columbine, Delphinium, Eglantine, Fleur, Gardenia, Heather, Iris, Jonquil, Lily y Mignonette. No fue capaz de encontrar una flor apropiada con la K.

–Kumquat –dijo una, que tenía el pelo largo y dorado, entre risitas, tapándose la cara con las manos.

–Knotweed –dijo otra, mientras se echaba a reír en el hombro de la hermana que tenía más cerca.

En ese momento todas se quedaron en silencio y sus ojos de color ámbar, esmeralda y zafiro bien abiertos y sin pestañear se fijaron en Val como si fueran gatas mirando a un gorrión acorralado, pensó Val.

Entonces, sin apenas oírse a sí mismo, mientras sus ojos pasaban de una cara a otra como si estuviera hechizado, dijo:

–Hay nombres comunes para las flores que una reina podría no conocer. Los granjeros llaman Ojo de *kestrel* o de *cernícalo* a un tipo de girasol, por su pequeño tamaño y el intenso color de su centro.

–Kestrel –repitió una princesa que lucía una enorme cabellera negra y rizada y ojos dorados. Su belleza mostraba más dignidad y seguridad que la de sus hermanas; sus ojos sonreían al apuesto y desconocido joven y parecían llenos de secretos–. Es una palabra bonita. Entonces, tal vez tu habrías sido Kestrel, Lily. Y Mignonette habría tenido tu nombre, si nuestra madre lo hubiera sabido.

Val supuso que ella era la mayor, y su suposición se confirmó cuando la más pequeña protestó:

–Pero, Aster, yo soy Mignonette. No quiero ser Lily.

–No te preocupes, patito, puedes seguir siendo tú misma –En ese momento bostezó y dio un paso adelante para besar el rostro taciturno de su padre–. ¡Que cansada estoy de repente! ¡Podría dormir durante un mes entero!

–Ojalá todas lo hicierais –murmuró el rey, inclinándose mientras una a una llenaban su cara de besos. Ellas se rieron de él y desaparecieron detrás de los cortinajes de encaje y gasa que rodeaban sus camas. Todo se quedó en silencio entonces, como si ya hubieran empezado a soñar.

El rey le enseñó a Val una habitación pequeña que había al final de la alcoba, donde podía fingir que estaba durmiendo mientras esperaba a que las princesas le revelaran el misterio de su danza.

–Aquí han venido muchos hombres –dijo el rey–, con la intención de ganar mi reino, pensando que ser más inteligente que mis hijas y obtener mi corona sería cosa de nada. Ahora todos están muertos, incluso los príncipes más alegres y bromistas. Mis hijas no tienen piedad, y yo tampoco. Pero si fracasas, lo lamentaré.

Val inclinó la cabeza.

–Yo también –respondió–. Parece tan extraño que ayer no tuviera nada que perder y hoy tenga todo que perder. Menos el amor.

–Solo eso ya me vuelve loco –dijo el rey bruscamente–. Ellas no pueden amar a nadie. Nada. Se ríen de los jóvenes a los que condeno a muerte, como si estuvieran hechizadas…

Entonces se giró, y en un tono que parecía más un ruego que una advertencia, añadió:

–No falles.

Val se sentó en la cama, que era la primera que había visto en muchos meses, y la última en la que se atrevería a dormir. Se acababa de quitar las botas, cuando la puerta se abrió y la mayor de todas, Aster, apareció con una copa de vino. Se la entregó a Val.

–Siempre compartimos una copa de vino con los invitados, en honor a la amistad. Mi padre se ha olvidado de decirnos tu nombre.

–Me llamo Val. Gracias por el vino.

Hizo como que se bebía un sorbo mientras pensaba la manera de fingir que se bebía la copa entera estando ella observándole con tanta atención.

–Es un nombre adecuado para un príncipe.

–Supongo que podría serlo, pero soy un soldado que vuelve a casa después de la batalla.

Ella levantó las cejas.

–Y has hecho una parada aquí para intentar ganar la corona por el camino. Deberías haber pasado de largo. Aquí no hay nada para ti excepto aquello de lo que has escapado en la batalla.

Val sonrió sosteniéndole la mirada, mientras echaba el vino en una de las botas que tenía junto a la rodilla.

–Aquí hay mejores recuerdos –dijo, e inclinó la copa en su boca como si estuviera bebiéndose hasta la última gota.

Cuando Aster se marchó, se echó en la cama y no se movió al escuchar que la puerta se volvía a abrir.

–Mírale –se burló una de ellas–. Está durmiendo como si ya estuviera muerto.

–He echado una poción más fuerte en el vino –respondió otra–. Tenía los ojos demasiado despejados.

Entonces oyó risas en la alcoba de las princesas, y el ruido de armarios, cofres y cajas que se abrían. Esperó, observándolas mientras pretendía estar roncando. Ellas se engalanaron con vestidos de seda brillante, encaje y terciopelo de color crema; se anudaron en los tobillos sus nuevas zapatillas de satén; sacaron de sus joyeros anillos, pendientes y collares de perlas; y se peinaron unas a otras, haciéndose tocados increíbles cogidos con lazos. Val ya había pensado antes que eran hermosas, pero ahora le parecían encantadoras, exquisitas, irreales, como si se hubiera bebido el vino y estuviera soñando. Estaba tan embelesado, que se había olvidado de roncar. Aster fue rápidamente a mirar a través de la puerta abierta, pero otra de las hermanas se rio.

–Duerme tan profundamente que se ha olvidado de respirar.

Aster se acercó a una cama que había en el centro de la alcoba. Tocó tres veces en el cabecero labrado, y la cama entera desapareció de repente, dejando un hueco oscuro y alargado en el suelo. Es como una tumba, pensó Val, mientras sentía que el corazón le latía con fuerza ante lo extraño de todo aquello. En una fila larga y elegante, empezando por la A y acabando por la M, las princesas descendieron bajo tierra.

Al ponerse las botas, el charquito de vino que había al fondo de una de sus botas despejó un poco los aturdidos pensamientos de Val. Antes de marcharse se acordó de ponerse por los hombros la raída capa. Mientras se apresuraba tras Mignonette, se miró en uno de los muchos espejos que había en la alcoba: *No hay ningún soldado*, le dijo el espejo*, la habitación está vacía*.

Por miedo a que el agujero que había en el suelo se cerrara detrás de las princesas, las siguió sin apenas guardar distancia. Y al dar el primer paso en los anchos y serpenteantes escalones pisó el dobladillo del vestido de Mignonette.

–¿Quién hay ahí? Aster, Lily, alguien me ha tirado del vestido –dijo la princesa sobresaltada.

Todas sus caras se volvieron hacia Val, una cadena silenciosa y encantadora de princesas que se extendía hacia abajo por los escalones. Aster fue la primera en volver a girarse, recogiéndose el vestido.

–No seas gansa, Mignonette. Te habrás pillado la falda con una astilla.

–Las escaleras son de mármol –murmuró Mignonette–. Y tengo un mal presentimiento esta noche.

Pero nadie la contestó. Val vio algo brillante más adelante, como si fuera la luz de miles de estrellas. Cuando llegaron al final de las escaleras, las princesas comenzaron a caminar por un camino ancho, bordeado de árboles. Las hojas de los árboles eran como la luz de la luna, o eso le parecía a Val, ya que eran como de un fuego plateado. Al final pudo ver que eran de plata, y se sintió tan maravillado que apenas podía respirar. Levantó la mano para tocar aquella belleza, y entonces, como si volviera a pensar de nuevo, arrancó una ramita con cuatro o cinco hojas para enseñársela al rey.

El árbol hizo ruido al astillarse, como si se hubiera caído una rama. Mignonette se volvió a girar.

–¿Qué es ese ruido? –gritó–. Tenéis que haberlo oído todas.

Val contuvo la respiración. Sus hermanas miraron con indiferencia a su alrededor.

–Ha sido el viento –dijo una de ellas.

–Han sido los fuegos artificiales del baile –dijo otra de ellas.

–Ha sonado –dijo Aster con ligereza– como si un corazón se partiera en dos.

Entonces giraron por otro camino, también amplio y bordeado de árboles. Val cerró los ojos y los volvió a abrir, pero lo que vio no había cambiado: todas las hojas de estos árboles estaban hechas de oro. Eran como lágrimas de oro que brillaban y resplandecían y se derretían en las ramas, y volaban hacia Val para que las cogiera. Otra vez rompió la rama más delgada, y otra vez el árbol hizo un sonido como si hubiera sido golpeado por un rayo.

–Otro corazón roto –dijo Aster, después de que Mignonette gritara y se quejara, y de que sus hermanas le pidieran que dejara de preocuparse porque si no nunca llegarían al baile. Solo Val la escuchó murmurar mientras se apresuraba tras sus hermanas:

–Tengo un mal presentimiento esta noche.

En el tercer camino, Val cogió una rama de hojas hechas de diamantes que brillaban como fuego blanco bajo la luz de la luna y desprendían una luz tan pura y fría que le hacía daño a los ojos. Mignonette dio un pisotón en el suelo y se puso a llorar al oír el ruido que hizo el árbol, pero sus hermanas, ya impacientes, siguieron apresurándose hacia el lago que había al final del camino. Solamente Aster redujo el ritmo para caminar con ella. En la conversación con Mignonette mantuvo la voz lo más calmada posible, pero de vez en

cuando echaba la vista atrás, en medio de la oscuridad salpicada de diamantes que tenían detrás, como si pudiera sentir a su perseguidor invisible.

–Tengo un mal presentimiento esta noche –dijo Mignonette con cabezonería.

Aster simplemente le respondió:

–Ya casi estamos. Una noche más y ya nunca más tendremos que volver a irnos.

En la orilla del lago, las esperaban doce botes. De cada bote salía una figura borrosa que cogía la mano de la princesa que se le acercaba y la ayudaba a subir. Val se quedó quieto quizá demasiado tiempo, intentando ver las caras de aquellos hombres elegantemente ataviados que empujaban los botes al agua. De repente, con una extraña sensación, susurró:

–Tengo un mal presentimiento esta noche.

Entonces se dio cuenta de que los botes estaban alejándose por el lago, así que se subió rápidamente en el último, que se tambaleó un poco hasta que Val consiguió mantener el equilibrio. Mignonette, en cuyo barco había tenido la mala suerte de meterse, de repente levantó la voz llamando a sus hermanas:

–¡Creo que alguien se ha subido al bote conmigo!

Las risas de sus hermanas se desvanecieron en el aire como pétalos llevados por el viento a su alrededor. Incluso el hombre que la llevaba sonrió.

–No te preocupes Mignonette. Yo podría llevar a una docena de huéspedes invisibles a la otra orilla.

Val se dio cuenta de que no movía la boca cuando hablaba, y de que tenía los ojos cerrados. Aun así, remaba con fuerza y en línea recta hacia el castillo iluminado con luces brillantes que había a la otra orilla del lago. Había antorchas encendidas en todas sus torres y muros, y las puertas estaban abiertas de par en par. Dentro se podía ver la luz de las velas y se oía el sonido de la música. El corazón de Val martilleaba con fuerza, tenía las manos tan frías como si estuviera esperando el comienzo de una batalla. No se atrevió a moverse hasta que Mignonette se bajó del bote. El hombre, que lo estaba empujando hacia la orilla, comentó desconcertado:

–Sí que parece más pesado que en otras ocasiones.

–¡Lo ves! –dijo Mignonette.

No obstante, cuando la princesa desembarcó, el hombre la rodeó con sus brazos y la besó con esa boca suya, que nunca se movía.

–No te preocupes, amorcito –dijo–. Mañana ya no tendrás nada que temer nunca más.

Val las siguió hasta el castillo y vio que a la entrada la luz de las antorchas caía directamente sobre sus caras. En ese instante se detuvo, sintiendo que sus huesos se volvían de hierro y su sangre se convertía en hielo por lo que acababa de ver.

–Esto –se oyó a si mismo susurrar–, es lo peor que podría pasar.

De todas formas, se obligó a entrar en el castillo y prestar atención al baile.

Las paredes del enorme salón en el que sonaba la música reflejaban el brillo de una madera extraña y pulidísima. El techo estaba decorado con tracerías de hojas doradas, y había velas por todas partes, dispuestas en candelabros de oro, plata y diamantes, que iluminaban las caras de las princesas, encantadoras y resplandecientes. Enseguida empezaron a bailar, sonriendo a unos príncipes que quizás alguna vez fueron hermosos, pero que ahora, para los ojos no hechizados de Val, llevaban muertos un tiempo. Tenían los labios con un rictus serio, como tajos inmóviles en caras demacradas y no abrían los ojos. La sala estaba llena de gente que miraba, todos con copas de vino vacías, moviendo los pies al ritmo de la música. La música, excesiva e inhumana, no dejaba descansar a los bailarines en ningún momento y los mantenía sin aliento girando por la pista sin parar. Los lazos terminaron deshechos, los dobladillos rasgados, las perlas repartidas por todas partes. Aun así, las princesas siguieron bailando, sin dejar de sonreír a los muertos que bailaban con ellas. Tenían las zapatillas de satén cada vez más sucias y arañadas, la fina tela con que estaban forradas se iba rasgando poco a poco hasta dejar los pies de las princesas al descubierto, cada vez con más ampollas provocadas por el roce contra el suelo reluciente. Aun así, siguieron bailando, llevadas por músicos ciegos que no tenían motivo alguno para descansar, pues habían dejado sus vidas en otro lugar.

–¡Menuda celebración habrá mañana por la noche! –escuchó Val muchas veces mientras esperaba–. ¡La boda de doce princesas, y un baile que no acabará nunca!

Al amanecer, cuando el lago comenzaba a teñirse de gris, la música paró por fin. En silencio y agotadas, las princesas montaron en sus botes y fueron devueltas a la otra orilla, donde besaron las caras congeladas de sus príncipes y se despidieron de ellos hasta el día siguiente. Esta vez, Val iba delante de las princesas para poder llegar a su cama y hacerse el dormido antes de que ellas regresaran. Mantuvo el ritmo de Aster. Parecía una flor

marchita, pensó, sus ojos tenían aspecto preocupado, pero la joven aún no era capaz de imaginar por qué. Se tropezó varias veces, con piedrecillas del camino o con el metal afilado y brillante de las hojas caídas, y hacía gestos de dolor cuando se le clavaba algo a través de los agujeros que tenía en la suela de las zapatillas y que dejaban al aire sus pies descalzos. Val quería cogerle la mano y ayudarla a caminar, consolarla, pero se imaginó que en un lugar como aquel él estaría aún menos vivo para ella que los muertos.

Cuando llegó a las escaleras, se paró a quitarse las botas para poder subir corriendo sin hacer ruido. Adelantó a Aster, y con el movimiento, a Val se le derramó en el suelo un poco del vino que aún había en una de las botas. El joven vio la cara de sorpresa de Aster, con los ojos bien abiertos, y la notó vacilar, pero no dijo nada a sus hermanas. Tampoco dijo nada cuando un momento más tarde le encontró durmiendo en su cama. Otra de las hermanas dijo con voz cansada:

–Por lo menos morirá antes de que nos despertemos. Y ya nadie tendrá que morir por nosotras nunca más.

Esperó a que todas se metieran en la cama y toda la habitación estuviera en calma, excepto por la luz de la mañana. Entonces se levantó y salió silenciosamente con las botas en una mano y las hojas mágicas en la otra, para ir a hablar con el rey.

El rey estaba en la puerta de la alcoba de sus hijas, dando vueltas de un lado a otro intranquilo; tampoco había dormido esa noche. Apretaba con la mano la enorme espada, la soltaba, así una y otra vez. Se quedó mirando a Val, sin palabras, con ojos apagados, hasta que Val habló.

–Van al inframundo –dijo Val–. Bailan con los muertos.

Entonces le enseñó al rey los tres tipos de hojas, de plata, de oro y de diamantes, que solo podían provenir de un lugar tan encantado como aquel. Le temblaban las manos del cansancio y del horror. Y la voz, también le temblaba.

–Mañana por la noche se casarán con sus príncipes muertos y nunca las volverás a ver.

El rey, con un grito de rabia y pena, arrancó las hojas de las manos de Val y abrió la puerta de la alcoba de golpe. De entre las cortinas de cada cama asomaron caras exhaustas y asombradas. El rey les enseñó las hojas y la luz del sol resplandeció en ellas convirtiendo el oro, la plata y el diamante en fuego.

–¿Qué es esto? –exigió–. ¿De dónde son estas ramas? Decídmelo, hijas. Decidme donde conseguirlas y entonces sabré donde encontraros.

Se quedaron mirando a las hojas. Poco a poco, como si hasta entonces solo hubieran estado soñando que estaban despiertas, sus caras cobraron vida con expresiones de miedo y confusión. De debajo de sus camas se oyó un enorme chasquido de madera astillada, como si un árbol hubiera sido golpeado por un trueno, o un corazón se hubiera roto en dos.

Mignonette fue la primera en echarse a llorar.

–No, no es real –dijo entre lágrimas–. ¡Era solo un sueño! ¡No puedes haber cogido esas hojas de un sueño!

–Val os siguió –dijo el rey mientras alrededor suyo todas sus hijas lloraban como si les hubieran roto el corazón–. Las cogió para enseñármelas.

–¿Cómo podía ser aquello verdad? –susurró Aster, temblando en su cama mientras las lágrimas le caían por la cara–. Nosotras… Nosotras estábamos prometidas con… Bailábamos con…

–Príncipes muertos –dijo Val.

Ella se le quedó mirando, su cara estaba tan pálida como el alabastro.

–¿Qué príncipes muertos? –le preguntó a Val–. ¿Los que nuestro padre mataba por nuestra culpa?

–No lo sé –le respondió con gentileza, aunque él también temblaba solo de pensarlo.

La princesa cerró los ojos como para olvidar la pesadilla.

–Tú también podrías haber muerto, Val, si no hubieras estado alerta.

–Sabía que alguien nos estaba siguiendo –les dijo Mignonette a sus hermanas–. Traté de decíroslo. ¡Pero no me creíais!

–Todas estabais hechizadas –dijo Val.

Aster volvió a abrir los ojos, y le miró.

–¿Y yo sabía que tú estabas allí? –le preguntó con suavidad–. ¿O simplemente lo deseé?

Entonces se produjo otro sonido, el golpe que hizo al caer la gran espada desenvainada del rey. Después, el monarca, se quitó la corona de la cabeza y se la entregó a Val.

–Quédate con mi reino –dijo con alivio–. Has roto el hechizo que había sobre mi casa y sobre mí. Ya no quiero gobernar, llevo en mi recuerdo la muerte de demasiados inocentes.

–Bueno –dijo Val con incertidumbre, mientras giraba la corona en sus manos, que parecía demasiado grande para él–. Hay cosas peores.

Levantó la mirada, y miró a Aster buscando apoyo y amistad. Ella le devolvió una tímida sonrisa a través de las lágrimas, y se dio cuenta de que estaba de acuerdo con él: había cosas peores que las que al joven le ofrecían: un reino y la elección de un nombre de flor de la A a la M.

5.1.5. Problems of translation

As with any translation, the ones presented here were not without problems. However, as the translation issues found are not the focus of this TFM, only a general overview of the most important ones will be provided, with some examples to illustrate them. The story to which the example belongs to will be provided in brackets using the acronyms of the title.

The main problems encountered during the translation concern different linguistic dimensions: they include issues regarding the syntactic structure of the text, but they also have to do with semantic, lexical and phraseological problems, as well as cultural matters.

Regarding the structural problems, the main difficulty was to respect as much as possible the original sentence structure, which went in line with the aim of respecting the author's style and voice in the story. However, this wasn't always possible, given the different narrative pace of Spanish. Consequently, sentences such as *They were all ages, from a very little girl in a snowsuit with cat ears to an old man in a wheelchair, and all the races Liz had ever heard of, except maybe Native American* (MoM) were separated into two sentences in the translation to adapt it to a Spanish rhythm. Conversely, the opposite phenomenon also occurred: very short sentences in English were joined into one sentence in Spanish, so as to make it more natural, concerning punctuation. This is the case of the following excerpt: *and not get called a nerd. Or a geek. Or worse* (BC), which was rendered as *...sin que las acusaran de ser empollonas o frikis, o cosas peores*. This kind of adaptation was not necessary in all cases. And over all, style and punctuation tried to be respected at every moment.

As for problems not related to the syntactical structure, the first issue worth mentioning is the lack of tense correspondence between English and Spanish. The different uses of past and continuous forms affect the translation of these verbs, which results, for instance, in the translation of continuous tenses such as *things aren't working out at all* (F) into *las cosas no van nada bien*, employing a simple form instead.

Another issue, well explored in contrastive studies, is the use of the passive voice. Its frequent use in English makes it hard to translate into Spanish, where the passive is not such a natural voice. As a consequence, many passive structures had to be translated as active ones, as in *a fairy animal is given a task* (F), which was rendered as *algún animal-hada tenía que realizar una misión*.

Regarding more contrastive issues between English and Spanish, nominal structures were also problematic in their translation, as English is a language where complex nominalizations are frequent. These structures cannot be translated literally into Spanish, so in order to render them naturally they have to be translated as subordinates and verbs need to be introduced, like in the case of *the goblin's palace in the mountains* (F) into *el palacio del rey de los duendes, que estaba en las montañas*.

Another type of structure that presented problems for the translator were the adverbs ending in –ly. This kind of adverb is very common in the English language, but it is not always possible to render it into Spanish with its corresponding form, the adverb ending in –mente. To solve this problem, the translator turned to other structures such as in the cases of *he gazed wordlessly at Val* (TDP) and *her sisters glanced indifferently around them* (TDP), which were translated as *se quedó mirando a Val, sin palabras* and *sus hermanas miraron con indiferencia a su alrededor,* respectively.

Next in the list of morphological problems was the use of possessives. The English language presents a high frequency of use for this kind of words, but their use in Spanish is much lower, as the information they provide is often given by the pronouns that accompany the verb. Thus, the translation of sentences such as *her bones bumped under the surface of her brown, sagging skin* (TDP) omitted the possessive: *los huesos se le marcaban bajo la piel morena y envejecida.*

Moving onto more vocabulary related problems, endearment names such as *daddy* (MoM) were not easy to translate, as the endearment form in Spanish did not always sound appropriate in context. As a consequence, in cases such as this, it was rendered as

papá, instead of using other forms like *papi*. The downside of this translation was that it lost the connotation of endearment.

English, additionally, is a language rich on words that are directly connected to sounds or noises. But those words are not always possible to translate as such into Spanish, as they do not have a natural counterpart. Therefore, sentences like *there was another sound, the clang of the king's great sword* (TDP) were translated as *entonces se produjo otro sonido, el golpe que hizo al caer la gran espada*.

The next issue has to do with the relevance of suffixes in Spanish. They are a device frequently used to form words. An example of their relevance is exemplified by the translation of *little bear* (F) as *osito*.

Phraseology, also, is an important part of translation, since it is frequent in both languages, but phraseological expressions cannot be translated literally. They need to be translated taking into consideration the meaning behind the words, instead of simply the words. For instance, expressions such as *my heart sank* (F) were rendered as *se me cayó el alma a los pies.* Sayings present the same problem as phraseology, so sayings like *April showers bring May flowers* (MoM) turned into *marzo ventoso y abril lluvioso, hacen a mayo florido y hermoso*.

Wordplays were also another problematic aspect for the translator. It is very easy to combine words in English to make wordplays, but not so much in Spanish. For this reason, wordplays as *Nerstein* or *Geekstein* (BC) were both translated as *frikeinstein.*

The issue of emphasis was significant too, especially in the story of *Falada*, where it was constantly used. In English, emphasis is signaled by the use of italics, but the use of that device is not always possible or natural in Spanish. As a consequence, this sense of emphasis was lost in some cases of the translation, but in others it was possible to introduce other elements to represent that emphasis. This way, structures such as ***asked*** *me, you understand*, (F) were rendered as *bueno, me lo pedía, sí, sí.*

Additionally, there were particular words that gave many problems in order to look for the adequate translation. This was the case of *Becoming* (BC), which was something repeated through the whole story, and it was difficult to find a word that would capture the same meaning as *Becoming* in the tale. In the end, the solution was to translate it as *Crecer*, because it keeps the idea of growing to become what she is meant to be. It should be noted that this word was translated with a capital letter to stay faithful to the original,

where it is always written with a capital letter, as if this idea was an entity on its own. Other words written with a capital letter in the translation include the months of the year in *The Months of Manhattan*, but in this case it was because the months were personified, and thus, they functioned as the names of those characters.

Another of these challenging expressions was *fairy horse* (F). There is apparently no word in Spanish that keeps the magic that the word *fairy* has in combination with *horse*. English allows the possibility of combining words in plenty of natural ways, but when trying to translate it, it did not sound naturally in Spanish. The solution for this was to translate it as *yegua-hada*, as if it were a new horse breed.

The next set of translation problems has to do with culture-specific words, or words that are tied to cultural aspects. This means that there are certain references that readers may not understand completely as they do not belong to that same culture. Thus, for a better comprehension, this kind of words have to be adapted to the target language. Among this kind of words, there is the use of measures such as *miles* (BC), which were adapted into *kilómetros*, or school years as *6th grade* and *7th grade*, which in turn were translated as *6º de primaria* and *1º de ESO*, so that the reader did not get lost. Moreover, words denoting food, like *bagels* (BC) had to be adapted too, as that is not something commonly known in Spanish and would make the readers question what that was, distracting them from the story. In this case, it was translated as *bizcocho*. As for the names of places, such as *New Rochelle* (MoM) or the *East Side River* (MoM), they were left the same in order to keep the setting of the story intact. This went along with the purpose of respecting the authors behind the stories and their style. However, other names like *New York* (MoM) were translated into Spanish, since it is a well-known city and Spanish people know it as *Nueva York*.

Games were mentioned in some of the stories too. It was mostly card games, and luckily, these games are played in Spain too, so it was only a matter of looking for their denomination in Spain. This way, card games like *Old Maid* (MoM) were rendered into Spanish as *La Solterona*. Additionally, regarding the game of *Monopoly* (MoM), some properties were mentioned. As the story takes place in New York City, it seemed logical that the monopoly board that they use would be the American one. Therefore, the names of the properties were not translated.

The rest of translation problems were directly related to the genre of the stories: fairy tales. In fairy tales, a widely used device consists on the repetition of structures or

sentences to catch the reader's attention. This means that when translating, the translator must pay close attention for these structures, as their rendition into Spanish had to be the same every time, so as to keep this device intact. Sometimes these structures vary slightly from the first time they are first said to the next, so the translation has to do the same. For instance, the sentence *I was no better than a mangy plow horse on a turnip farm* (F) is later repeated as *I looked worse than a mangy plow horse on a turnip farm* (F). Therefore, in the Spanish text, they were rendered as *No era más que una vulgar yegua de tiro sarnosa de una granja de ganado* and *estaba mucho peor que una yegua de tiro sarnosa en una granja de ganado,* respectively.

Also directly connected to fairy tale translation is the use of certain fairy tale formulas, like for instance *one day long ago in a faraway country* (TDP). In order to translate this, it was thought appropriate to translate it following previous similar patterns found in the Spanish versions of fairy tales, so the final version was *hace mucho tiempo, en un país muy lejano*.

Next, there is rhymes, commonly found in fairy tales too. The hardest aspect to translate about rhymes is to keep the rhyme, while at the same time translating it into something that keeps the meaning and sounds natural instead of forced. The rhyme: *Blow, wind, with all your might. Blow Conrad's hat out of sight* (F) may serve as an illustrative example. In order to translate both meaning and rhyme, some adjustments had to be made to the structure, and the end result was *Sopla, viento, con todo tu poder, para el sombrero de Conrad dejar de ver*.

As for the characters' names, they sometimes carry more meaning than meets the eye. For instance, in the case of *Falada*, it comes from the Portuguese word that means 'to speak', and, as it is the name of a talking horse, it is a fitting name. Another name which fits this pattern is *Mignonette*, the name of the youngest princess in *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. Aside from the symbolism this flower may have, it also evokes a French word that means sweet little girl. Thus, it is no coincidence that it is the name of the youngest sister. Other names, however, like *Beth* or *Charise* do not have a meaning directly related to the character they represent. Moreover, in some cases such as the names of the rest of the twelve princesses – who are named after different flowers – do not have much relevance for the story and are barely mentioned. In the end, it was decided to leave all names intact, especially those that belong to the first group, so as not to alter the meaning behind the name. This decision seemed appropriate taking into consideration that the

translation was approached with the idea of respecting the author's style and decisions as much as possible. Furthermore, considering the audience in mind, with which the translations were made, it did not seem a hindrance to keep the original names, instead of translating them into Spanish. Nevertheless, there were two names where solutions had to be sought, in order for the names to have the same relevance in the story. The first of these names was *Val*, the soldier of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. His name needs to evoke bravery. Therefore, the first time he introduces himself it was rendered as *Val, de Valentín*. The other name was *Kestrel's Eye*, from the story of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* too. This name references a flower known as such by farmers, but its translation was very challenging as the importance of it resides in the fact it is a flower that starts with a 'K'. In the end, the reference was translated as *ojo de kestrel o de cernícalo*, so as not to break the 'K' pattern.

Lastly, there is the matter of the stories' titles. Considering that these stories were retellings of fairy tales, the name of the original fairy tale was looked into so as to see if there was any relation between the titles. If there was, the translation was made according to what those fairy tales had been previously entitled and their translations. The easiest to translate were *The Months of Manhattan* and *The Twelve Dancing Princesses.* Regarding *The Months of Manhattan*, the story is based on another tale by the name of *The Twelve Months* or *Los doce meses.* For this reason, the final translation was *Los meses de Manhattan*. As for *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, the original fairy tale is known by different names, but as one of those names is exactly the same as the retelling's title, both in English and Spanish, it was decided to reproduce that same title in Spanish: *Las doce princesas bailarinas*.

The next story *Falada: The Goose's Girls Horse* was also fairly easy to translate. The original text is known in Spanish by two different names – *la pastora de ocas* and *la pastora de gansos* –, but after investigating a little on the difference between '*ganso'* and *'oca'*, it was decided to translate the title as *Falada: la yegua de la pastora de ocas*. This is because according to the Spanish dictionary (DRAE), '*oca'* is the domestic goose, while '*ganso*' is the animal itself.

Finally, the hardest title to translate was that of *Becoming Charise*. The story it is based on is *The Ugly Duckling*, but as the titles have no connection between each other, there was no reference to use in its translation. In the end, it was rendered into Spanish as *Charise quiere crecer,* closer to the original title.

To sum this section up, it should be mentioned that there is never only one solution possible for a translation problem, as different interpretations can be made depending on the translator's position and the techniques used.

5.2. Domesticated translation

5.2.1. Tentative guidelines

In order to assess on the similarities between domesticating a text and retelling a story from a practical point of view, an imaginary translation commission was devised. This commission by an imaginary publishing house with specific guidelines and a particular audience in mind would demand a marked domestication of the stories here translated. However, so as not to give a second version of the four selected stories, a series of tables will be provided with the elements that would be adapted and their corresponding domesticated equivalents, which will serve as guidelines for the analysis. Of course, if the stories were translated completely for this commission, the translations would need more adjustments to fit the domesticated elements, but for the purpose of this analysis the tables seem to be sufficient.

This extreme domesticated translation would belong to a particular fairy tale collection intended for Spanish-speaking local readers between the ages of 9-10 to 15-16, promoting a local colour and a close connection to the audience's experience, identity feelings and own folklore.

Elements that should be domesticated are included in *Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8* in section 5.2.3. They comprise the names of the characters, traditional American festivities, food and the settings. However, a comparison between the selected retellings of fairy tales and their original versions seems to also be necessary so as to use it in section 5.2.4. to assess on the techniques of domestication and retelling.

5.2.2.The original fairy tale vs. the fairy tale retelling: similarities, differences and retelling techniques

In order to understand the retelling techniques used in these four stories, a comparison between them and their source fairy tales will be presented here, showing the similarities and differences between both versions.

- *The Months of Manhattan*

This story originates on a Slavic tale, *The Twelve Months*. As the researcher does not understand any Slavic languages, an English translation of the original tale was used to compare the retelling to the source text, more specifically, a Czech-based version included in the book *World Folklore for Storytellers: Tales of Wonder, Wisdom, Fools and Heroes* by H. J. Sherman (2014, pp.109-112).

In the original tale there are the main character, her stepsister, her stepmother and the twelve personified months. The girl, Marusa, is treated poorly by the stepmother and the stepsister, Holena and spends all her time doing chores. She is very beautiful, which is why the stepmother and stepsister want to get rid of her, so that when the suitors come they don't fall for her. They send her to the frozen forest, as they are in January, with the hope that she perishes there. They ask her to gather impossible things, since neither red apples, nor violets or strawberries grow in January. But every time she goes into the forest, she runs into the personified months. Because she is kind to them asking them for permission to warm her hands in their fire and for help, they help her every time to get what she needs. Conversely, when her stepsister decides to go to the forest herself, she runs into the Months and is rude to them. So, as a punishment, she freezes to death. The same fate awaits the stepmother when she follows her daughter, Holena, into the forest.

In *Table 1* there is a contrastive summary of main features, both similarities and differences, between the original tale and Delia Sherman's retelling.

	The Twelve Months	*The Months of Manhattan*
Setting	Forest	Modern New York City
Characters	The twelve months, personified The main character, Marusa	The twelve months, personified The main character, Liz

	The stepmother The stepsister, Holena	The stepmother The stepsister, Beth The father
Point of View	3rd person narration	3rd person narration
Main Events	Marusa is treated badly by her stepmother and stepsister, who are jealous of her beauty, so they send her to the forest to get rid of her. Marusa goes into the forest looking for violets, then strawberries and finally apples. She meets the Months, who help her get everything she needs each time because she is nice to them. Holena is jealous and believes Marusa is hiding something, so she goes into the forest by herself. She, then, runs into the Months but she is very rude to them. As a consequence, she freezes to death. The stepmother goes after Holena, but meets the same fate as her daughter in the forest. Marusa inherits everything and marries a good man. They live happily ever after.	Liz is a good girl, who tries to be nice to her new stepmother and stepsister. But Beth doesn't like her new life and is very rude to everyone. Liz has to write a paper for school, and she needs to go the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her stepmother agrees to take her, but tells her to be fast, and then leaves her alone to find the right wing of the Museum. Liz gets lost, and runs into an empty room with a painting, in which there are twelve people. She talks with and is nice to them, and in return they agree to help her with her assignment. They give her luck. Afterwards, she is very lucky in everything where luck is involved. Beth becomes very jealous and confronts her. After learning about the Months, Beth goes to the museum herself and runs into the painting with

		the Months, but she is very rude to them. As a consequence, she becomes very unlucky and everything bad happens to her. Until one day she starts to realize that things aren't so bad and she regrets having been so rude to everyone. From then on, things go back to normal and they all live happily as a family.

Table 1: Characteristics of *The Twelve Months vs. The Months of Manhattan*

As can be observed in *Table 1*, Delia Sherman's version has distinctive elements that keep the story's theme, while introducing new features that signal her narrative as a retelling. To this respect, the most significant point is the change of setting, one of the clearest options to create a new version of a tale, as maintained in section 3.2. *The Months of Manhattan*, takes place in modern day New York City and instead of meeting the Months in a forest, the main characters meet them in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Additionally, the girls have been renamed according to more modern times too, to fit the setting.

The change in the setting modifies the story to a point where certain elements need to be adjusted in the story too, which is why some of the events of the story, including the ending, change. As it was previously mentioned, changing events in the tales is also a typical trait in retellings.

In this case, events change in the sense that Liz is not being ordered around by her stepmother and stepsister. A new figure has been added to the story, that of her father, who acts as a trigger for her seeming unhappiness. Liz's father has remarried and now the girl has a new stepmother and a new stepsister, who is just not very nice to anyone. Liz meets the Months by chance, because she gets lost and is running out of time to do her assignment. But she chats with them, and she is very pleasant, so in return they help her out, and she becomes very lucky. Beth's jealousy is what drives her to meet the

Months here too, and as in the original tale, she is very rude to them. However, unlike in the original one she doesn't die. Instead, she becomes very unlucky until one day she realizes the error of her ways. As a consequence, things become normal again for everyone so that they can live on as a family. It is to be noted that the stepmother character doesn't have such a prominent role in the retelling as she had in the source text.

Despite the above-mentioned differences, the main message of the story remains the same: the importance of being kind and nice to others.

- *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse*

The original fairy tale of *The Goose Girl* was first published by the Grimm Brothers in their second volume of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. For the comparison purpose of this section, María Antonia Seijo Castroviejo's Spanish translation of the tale has been used, published by Anaya in 1985 (pgs. 165 – 174) in *Cuentos de niños y del hogar II*.

In *The Goose Girl*, the reader meets a young princess, who is travelling to a nearby kingdom to meet his fiancée. Her mother gives her a handkerchief with three drops of her blood for protection. In her journey, she travels with her talking horse, Falada, and a maid. During the trip, she gets thirsty, so she asks her maid to get her a cup of water, but the maid refuses and she has to get her own. The second time this happens, she loses the handkerchief, and in turn she is no longer protected. Consequently, the maid takes the princess place, including her clothes and horse. When they arrive to the kingdom of her fiancée, the maid, pretending to be the princess, asks the old king to put the princess to work, and to behead Falada, for fear that she would speak.

The princess, who is now working with the boy who takes care of the geese, bribes the executioner so that he hangs Falada's head under a door she passes through every day. Every day, she speaks with the head when she passes under with the geese and the boy who takes care of them, Conrad. And when they are in meadow, she lets her hair loose, which is like gold. Conrad always tries to take a lock of her hair but she chants something, and he spends the rest of the time chasing his hat while she braids her hair. One day, Conrad becomes angry and goes to tell the king everything. The following morning, the king follows them and sees the whole thing, but when he confronts the princess she does not tell him anything. Instead, he hides while she talks to the stove, so that he can hear the whole story. When he learns the truth, he tells his son and they set the maid up. The old king asks her what the perfect punishment for someone who has lied to the king should

be, and once she answers him, he tells her that her suggestions will be accepted and she will be punished accordingly. Afterwards, the princess marries the prince and they live happily.

	The Goose Girl	*Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse*
Setting	Unnamed kingdom	Elfland Human world, unnamed kingdom
Characters	The princess The horse, Falada The maid The old king The prince The goose boy, Conrad	The princess, Belinda The horse, Falada The maid, Dagmar (goblin) The maid's horse The old king The prince, Humbert The younger prince, Herkimer The boy, Conrad The elf queen
Point of View	3rd person narration	1st person narration: Falada's point of view
Main Events	The princess parts to her fiancée's kingdom with Falada and her maid. In the journey the maid takes the place of the princess. In the new kingdom, the princess is sent to help the goose boy (Conrad) and Falada is beheaded. Her head is hanged in a door that the princess passes under every day.	Falada is a fairy horse that lives in Elfland, and works for the queen. One day, she has to give a human boy (Conrad) a ride but he is annoying so she throws him to the bushes. Falada is banished to the human world to do a task if she ever wants to come back. Her task is to take the princess (Belinda) to her new kingdom. Meanwhile, Conrad is sent back to his mother.

	Every day she talks with Falada, and then she sends Conrad to chase after his hat when he tries to take a lock of her golden hair. Conrad goes to tell the king, who hides the next day and sees everything. The king finally learns the truth about the princess. He sets up the maid by asking her the perfect punishment for someone who deceives the king and then tells her that that is her punishment. The princess marries the prince.	Belinda parts to her fiancée's kingdom with Falada, her maid (Dagmar) and her maid's horse. In the journey, Dagmar takes Belinda's place. Falada discovers that Dagmar's horse can talk too. Once they arrive to the new kingdom, Dagmar marries the prince (Humbert), Belinda is sent to a goose farm and Falada is sent to work on a mill. Every day, Belinda passes in front of the mill field with the geese and talks to Falada. Accompanying her is Conrad. Conrad tries to take strands of Belinda's golden hair so Falada teaches her some magic to send his hat flying and he spends the rest of the time chasing his hair. Conrad goes to tell this to the king, and the king hides in the meadow to see everything. Afterwards, he confronts Belinda and Falada, and Belinda bravely tells him the truth of what happened during their journey. By the time they get to the palace, Dagmar has run away with Humbert and her horse.

		Belinda marries the younger prince, Herkimer. Meanwhile, Falada returns to Elfland, where she sees that the queen has visitors: It is Dagmar, the prince, and her horse. Falada talks with the horse and it is discovered that he had a mission too: For Belinda to learn some common sense before becoming queen.

Table 2: Characteristics of *The Goose Girl vs. Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse*

The lesson of this story is about the importance of being truthful, as lying has dire consequences. In *The Goose Girl*, the maid ends up paying her lies and deceit with her death. However, in Farmer's retelling the ending is completely different, due to the way she chooses to retell the story, which entails that certain elements of the plot have to change too.

The most significant characteristic that separates the retelling from the source text, is the fact that Farmer's story is told from Falada's point of view, a device characteristic of the *fractured fairy tale*. The shift of perspective allows the possibility of starting the story a bit earlier, so that the reader knows the story of Falada prior to what happens in the fairy tale, which is another possibility of retellings and *fractured fairy tales*.

In this reimagining of *The Goose Girl*, Falada is a fairy horse that works for the elf queen and is banished to the human world for misbehaving. This sets in motion the events of the original fairy tale, as the task she has to perform is to take princess Belinda to her fiancée's kingdom. Also unlike in the source material, the maid that accompanies her in the modern narrative is a goblin, and she and her horse also have a task: to make sure that Belinda grows up before becoming queen, since here she is very childish. This is the justification for taking her place. Belinda is sent to the goose farmer too, but Falada is not beheaded here. Instead she is chained to a mill: this is the biggest change of events.

The rest of the tale occurs in a similar manner, except that when everything is discovered, Dagmar runs away with the prince she married and Belinda marries the younger prince instead. And Falada, in the end, returns to Elfland.

The moral lesson of the story, as a consequence of the change in the ending, is not so clear in the retelling. Perhaps this may also be because the intention of the retelling is more to entertain the audience and to show that animals do not need to be killed in fairy tales for the sake of the princess rather than to teach and educate.

- *Becoming Charise*

Based on *The Ugly Duckling*, the original tale was first published by Hans Christian Andersen in 1843 as part of the collection *New Fairy Tales.* For the comparison of the original tale and the retelling, the English translation by Erik Christian Haugaard included in *The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories* (2011, pgs. 216-224) has been used.

The tale starts in a farm, with a duck, who is waiting for her eggs to hatch open. All of the eggs hatched, but for one which was the largest. When the egg finally broke, the young animal that came out was very large and not like the other little ducks. When they got into the water, the young one swam as well as the others, so the mother believed that he must be her son and took him along. All the other ducks made fun of him and rejected him, so he flew away and ended up in a place inhabited by wild ducks. They told him he was too ugly, but that it did not matter if he married one of them. After a couple of days, some wild geese came and also told him that he was too ugly, which is why he should go with them and marry one of them. But then, men came shooting at the geese, so he decided to lay still until everything was quiet. Afterwards, he flew to a cottage. The owner of the cottage kept him in hopes that he could lay eggs, but all he wanted was to go swim in the water. As he was not understood there, he decided to leave again but everywhere he went, he was avoided as he was too ugly.

Time went by, and one evening a flock of swans came into the lake he was in. As they flew away, all he could do was watch them with excitement. He was drawn to them, and wanted to be as beautiful as them. Then, winter came and passed and when it was spring time, he was finally able to fly. He remembered the swans, so he went looking for them, for he preferred to be killed by them for being ugly than to go through everything he had gone through. But when he reached them he saw his reflection in the water, and realized

he was no longer ugly. Now, he was as beautiful as any other swan, for he himself was a swan.

In *Table 3* the comparison between the core elements of the *Ugly Duckling* and *Becoming Charise* can be found.

	The Ugly Duckling	*Becoming Charise*
Setting	Natural landscapes A farm, a cottage	A high school An American town
Characters	The ugly duckling Other ducks, both wild and domestic The swans The geese Other animals Humans: hunters, farmer	Charise Aunt Tamara Mr. MahFool Tibb Gleason
Point of View	3rd person narration	3rd person narration mixed with 1st person narration (Charise's point of view)
Main Events	The ugly duckling is born a little later than the rest of the other ducklings, and he is too big and too ugly. The rest of the ducks in the farm make fun of him and reject him so he goes away and finds some wild ducks. The wild ducks tell him he is too ugly but that he can stay if he marries one of them. Then, some wild geese come and tell him the same. But hunters come and kill the geese so he runs away again. He finds a cottage where he stays for some time. As he feels misunderstood he leaves again. One day he sees	Charise is in the school bus, sitting alone, and imagining her own world. She wants to be like Albert Einstein. She dreams about going to Bayley Academy, a much better school than her own. She does not fit in with the other kids of her school. One day, in science class, the teacher, Mr. Mahfouz, sends them an assignment about science on TV. Her assignment is really good, so the teacher asks her to stay after class. The teacher offers to sponsor her for a spot on Bayley Academy. But when she talks to her aunt

	some swans and wish to be like them. Then, winter comes and he starves. When it is spring he realises he can fly now. So he goes to find some swans. And when he finds them he sees his reflection in the water and realises he is no longer an ugly duckling, as he is a swan himself.	Tamara, she says that Charise can't go there, as it is too far. Charise gets angry. The next day she promises herself not to cry when she goes to talk to Mr. Mahfouz. The teacher tells her that they will do the best they can and asks her about the story of the ugly duckling. He, then, tells her that he was going to become a swan, no matter what. And Charise finally understands that no matter where she is, she is going to become what she is meant to be.

Table 3: Characteristics of *The Ugly Duckling vs. Becoming Charise*

The moral lesson of *The Ugly Duckling* is about appearances, and how we should not judge someone by their physical look. But it is also about learning not to give up, as everyone will eventually find their place. In both cases, the lessons of the tale remain intact in the retelling, despite the many significant differences that the retelling presents, as shown in *Table 3*.

Koja's story tells the story with a modern setting and human characters, instead of animal ones. By changing the characters to humans, this forces a change in the story events. The author uses a different set of situations to show that Charise, the ugly duckling of the story, does not feel that she fits in, and how she wants to be something else: she wants to Become –what she is meant to be –, as she says in the story. As the setting is a modern school, each situation employed to show she is the ugly duckling who does not fit in has to do with other kids at the school and their attitudes, instead of being animals in their environments. Nevertheless, the ending is the same. She realises, just like the Ugly Duckling, that she will become what she is meant to be no matter what, and that she will find her place. Therefore, the lesson of the story remains the same.

- *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*

This retelling is based on the fairy tale of the same name, *The Twelve Dancing Princesses.* However, in English it is also known by the names of *The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes* or

The Shoes that Were Danced to Pieces. The original tale was published by the Grimm Brothers in their second volume of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, as tale number 133. In order to compare the original fairy tale with the retelling, as shown in *Table 4*, the researcher has used the Spanish translation included in *Cuentos de niños y del hogar III*, published by Anaya in 1986 (pgs. 62-64) and translated directly from German by María Antonia Seijo Castroviejo under the title *Los zapatos gastados de bailar*.

The fairy tale of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* introduces a king and his twelve daughters, who go dancing every night until their shoes are worn out. No one knows where they go, as the door of their chamber is always closed, so the king tells that anyone who discovers it will marry one of his daughters and be king when he dies, and to discover it they will have three nights. But every prince who tries to find out fails, and ends up dying. Then, an injured soldier, who is on his way to the city, runs into an old lady on the way. He jokes about solving the princesses' mystery and the lady tells him that all he needs to do is to not drink the cup of wine the princesses offer him, and then she gives him a cloak that will make him invisible so that he can follow them.

So the soldier goes to the palace, and when the princesses offer him the wine, he pretends to drink it and then fakes being asleep. The princesses get dressed in beautiful gowns and then touch one of the beds, which moves and leaves a hole in the floor. The soldier follows them under the earth, they go through beautiful roads with trees made of silver, gold, and diamonds. As proof, he takes some branches, but the noise scares the youngest princess. Nevertheless, the rest of the princesses ignore it. Then, they arrive at a lake, where twelve princes are waiting for the princesses. They take them to the castle in the other side of the lake, and there they dance all night. On the way back, the soldier goes ahead of them to fake being asleep before they can realise he has followed them. The same thing happens the other two nights, as he follows them. But on the third night, he takes with him a cup from the castle as proof of evidence too, and the next day when it is time to talk to the king he takes the cup and the branches and tells him that his daughters go underground to a castle and spend the night dancing with princes. Finally, as a reward, he marries the oldest daughter.

	The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes	***The Twelve Dancing Princesses***
Setting	Unnamed kingdom	A faraway, unnamed country
Characters	The king	The king

	The twelve princesses The soldier The old lady The princes	The twelve princess: Aster, Bluet, Columbine, Delphinium, Eglantine, Fleur, Gardenia, Heather, Iris, Jonquil, Lily and Mignonette. The soldier, Val The old lady The dead princes
Point of View	3rd person narration	3rd person narration
Main Events	A king has twelve daughters, who go dancing every night and their shoes end up worn-out every night. No one knows where they go, so the king promises his kingdom to whoever figures it out. Many princes die trying. A soldier runs into an old lady in his way to the city and she tells him how to find out the truth about the princesses. The soldier goes to the palace. Once he is with the princesses, he pretends to drink the wine and fall asleep. Then, he puts the invisibility cloak the old lady gave him and follows the princesses underground. The princesses go dancing with some princes to a castle that is underground. For proof, the soldier gathers branches of trees that are made of silver, gold and diamonds. He also takes a cup from the castle. The youngest princess is the only one that believes that something is wrong that night. He does the same for the two following nights, and after the	A soldier, Val, is going home after the war. He runs into an old lady and shares his food with her. In return for his kindness, she tells him how to find out the truth about the princesses from the nearby kingdom, and that his cloak will make him invisible. The king has twelve daughters, who go dancing every night and their shoes end up worn-out every night. No one knows where they go, so the king promises his kingdom to whoever figures it out. Many princes have died trying. Val goes to the palace and the king introduces him to her daughters, who are named after flowers. That night, he pretends to drink the wine they give him and then fall asleep, while the princesses change. The oldest princess knocks on one of the beds and a hole on the ground opens. He follows them, with his cloak on, and during the journey the youngest princess believes that someone is following them, and that

	third day, he goes to tell the king everything he discovered. In the end he marries the eldest daughter and will become king.	something is not right, but none of the others gives her any credit. In the journey he takes branches of trees that are made of silver, gold and diamonds as proof for the king. When they get to a lake, across of which there is a castle, the princes are waiting for the girls to take them to the dance. Val realises that the princes are dead. In the castle, he overhears some say that the next day there will be a wedding and that the princesses will never leave again. It will be an eternal dance. When it is time to leave, he goes ahead of them so that they do not realise he has followed them. In the morning, he talks to the king, who in turn confronts the princesses. This wakes them up from the enchantment, as they were spelled and that is why they went to the underworld every night and danced with dead princes. The king, then, gives his crown to Val.

Table 4: Characteristics of *The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes vs. The Twelve Dancing Princesses*

This fairy tale intends to show that deceit is always uncovered in the end. The purpose of the story is fairly similar, and as far as retellings go, this one is a very conventional retelling. The tale follows the same line as the original story, except for the fact that it gives background information on both the soldier and the princesses.

Although the key events of the tale are the same too, the retelling expands the story by introducing a darker element to the story. McKillip's version states that the princesses are not merely escaping underground to dance, but that they are enchanted and do not realise that they go to the underworld every day to dance with dead princes.

All in all, this retelling is the one that is the most similar to the original tale, regarding the four here studied. Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate how even the smallest detail can be used to retell an old story anew.

5.2.3.Domesticated stories: tentative suggestions

As part of the fictitious translation commission devised for section 5.2., a list of the elements in each story that could exemplify what a domesticated translation would look like will be offered. It will be accompanied by an explanation on why the translator has selected them and why those translations have been presented.

- *The Months of Manhattan*

The Months of Manhattan presents plenty of elements that can be domesticated, as it takes place in modern New York, and therefore, there are several references to foreign cultural elements. *Table 5* shows the most relevant terms or expressions with their domesticated translation.

The Months of Manhattan	Domesticated translation: Los meses de Madrid
The Twelve Months of Manhattan	Los doce meses de Madrid
Elizabeth Liz Wallach Beth Dodson	Isabel Isa García Chabeli Pérez
Peter Minuit	Pedro Márquez
New York City Upper West Side Central Park	Madrid El barrio de Salamanca Parque del Retiro
Go sledding in Central Park	Ir a patinar sobre hielo en la plaza de Colón
San Francisco	Barcelona
Cape Cod	Alicante
New Rochelle	Jaca
Metropolitan Museum of Art - American Wing - American Furniture - Medieval Treasury - Armours - European Decorative Arts - Cloudy glass cups	Museo del Prado - Sección de pintura española - Obras del período barroco - Sección de pintura italiana - Escultura - Sección de exposiciones temporales - Piezas arqueológicas[4]

[4] The current temporary exposition *Tesoros de la Hispanic Society of America* (04/04/17 – 10/09/17) includes archaeological pieces, among other things.

Rockefeller Centre Atlas Statue	La puerta del Sol La estatua del oso y el madroño
East River	El río Manzanares
Bronx Zoo	El Zoo de Madrid
Hot apple cider	Chocolate caliente
Thanksgiving	El día de todos los santos
A heavy Bronx accent	Un acento andaluz marcado
A New Yorker	Un madrileño
Monopoly - Boardwalk - Park Place	 - Paseo de la Castellana - Paseo del Prado
Sand Fleas	Medusas

Table 5: Domesticated translation of *The Months of Manhattan*

For this story, the first element that stands out is the setting, which is New York City, and all the other places mentioned, not only of New York, but of other American cities. Because New York is one of the most important and well known cities of USA, it was decided that the counterpart in this translation would be Madrid. Once that was settled, the rest of the places that have to do with New York were translated as iconic places of Madrid. So as to keep a certain correspondence and sense in the story, the parks, museums, places and areas were substituted by parks, museums, places and areas of Madrid respectively. As for the reference of 'going sledding in Central Park', the girl is talking about going there during Christmas, so the translator looked for activities done in Madrid during Christmas and found that this year there was a skating ring placed in Colón.

Regarding the Bronx accent of one of the characters of the story, it was decided to translate is as an Andalusian accent because there is not a significant difference in the accent of people from a specific area of Madrid. The Andalusian accent is easier to differentiate, and it is very recognizable among Spanish people.

Next, concerning the rest of American cities mentioned, the criteria for establishing those correspondences was the following: For San Francisco to be Barcelona, it was translated as that because San Francisco is far away from New York, and additionally it is well known and has beaches. Barcelona is another well known city in Spain and it also has a beach. The translation of Cape Cod as Alicante followed a similar pattern, as it is mentioned to be the place where the family goes on holidays to the beach, and many Spanish people go to Alicante on holidays. Lastly, Jaca was chosen to replace New Rochelle because one of the girls mentions that in New Rochelle snows a lot during Christmas, and Jaca is one of the places famous to go skiing in Spain.

Connected to the election of one or another city is the election of other elements like the translation for Thanksgiving or for the sea fleas. The first it was suggested that it could be translated either as *el día de todos los santos*, a national holiday that takes place the 1st of November, the same month as Thanksgiving. As for the second, sea fleas were translated as *medusas* (jellyfish), because they are very common in the Mediterranean beaches, where Alicante is located. The domestication of the setting also conditioned the references to the Monopoly game. As now the setting is in Spain, the monopoly board used by the family had to be the one popular in Spain, which is why the corresponding property names were translated so as to fit the Spanish board.

In order to make elements more familiar it was also decided to domesticate the reference to hot apple cider, as it is not a common drink in Spain. Thus, it was substituted for another drink better known here.

Lastly, the names of the characters had to be domesticated too, for the audience to believe that the story takes place in Madrid. There is a game with the names of the two girls, as they are both short for *Elizabeth*. In order to keep this game in Spanish, several names were suggested, but in the end *Isabel* was chosen, which has two different nicknames.

- *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse*

The tale of *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse* did not present so many elements to domesticate as not many explicit cultural references were made. The reason for this is that the setting is a fairy tale-like setting, meaning that there are no explicit comments about a place or area. Nevertheless, the most important elements that had to be domesticated from this table and their translation are presented in *Table 6*.

Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse	Domesticated translation: Eufemia: La yegua de la pastora de ocas
Falada	Eufemia
Princess Belinda	La princesa Beatriz
Conrad	Conrado
Dagmar	Sandra
Prince Humbert	El príncipe Héctor
Prince Herkimer	El príncipe Hugo
Bears (in the forest)	Osos pardos
A turnip farm	Granja de ganado

Table 6: Domesticated translation of *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse*

The most significant elements that had to be domesticated in this story were the name of the characters. With most of the characters, it was a fairly simple process, since the names

had no hidden meaning. However, with Falada it was a more difficult process. Falada comes from the Portuguese '*falar'*, which means to speak. Falada is literally the horse that speaks. In the end, to domesticate the name in Spanish, *Eufemia* was chosen, which means '*de buena palabra',* or *'elocuente'*. It was thought appropriate because the name still reflects the characteristic of a horse who speaks.

As for the other elements domesticated shown in *Table 6*, the reference to the bears was translated as *osos pardos*, because they are the type of bears that live in the Spanish forests and mountains. Finally, the reference to a turnip farm was substituted as *granja de ganado* (cattle farm), since there are no turnip farms in Spain but there are plenty of cattle farms.

- *Becoming Charise*

Becoming Charise, just like *The Months of Manhattan*, takes place in a modern real setting, and consequently presents more elements to be domesticated. The translation suggested for these elements is shown is *Table 7*.

Becoming Charise	Domesticated translation: Carmen quiere crecer
Charise	Carmen
Tibb Gleason	Tomás
Aunt Tamara	La tía Teresa
Clarissa	Clara
DeeDee	Zori
DeJuan	David
Mr. Mahfouz	Sr. Galan
Mark Carver	Marcos Calvo
Nerdstein	Frikeinstein
Geekstein	Frikeinstein
Mr. MahFool	Sr. Gañán
Raisin bagels	Bizcocho de chocolate
Cheese sandwich	Bocadillo de jamón
Hot pepperoni pizza	Paella
Sixth grade Seventh grade	6º de primaria 1º de ESO
School: - Lockers - Locker partner - Lunchroom	 - Cajoneras - Compañero de pupitre - Comedor/Cafetería
Jackson (school)	Colegio Francisco Ayala
Bayley Academy	Instituto Diego Velázquez
Four-square	La rayuela
Card games: - Hearts - Bump Rummy	 - Corazones

	- Rummy[5]
The Regulars The Outsiders	Los pijos Los rebeldes
Slinkys	Muelle gigante
Baseball	Baloncesto
Miles	Kilómetros

Table 7: Domesticated translation of *Becoming Charise*

Among the elements to domesticate that stood out in this story there are characters' names, vocabulary related to school and food and certain games. The characters' names were easy to domesticate, as they only had to be substituted by Spanish names, except for *DeeDee*, which was slightly more complex. This name is of Welsh and Latin origin, and is associated with joy. The translation chosen for it was *Zori*, which is short of *Zorione*, a Basque name which means happiness. Since *DeeDee* is of Welsh origin, English speakers from outside of Wales may not be familiar with it. *Zori* follows this same pattern, as it is a name that Spanish speakers may not be familiar with because of its Basque origin.

The nicknames, however, were not so easy to translate, as in English they are formed by wordplays that combine insults with names. The domesticated translation aimed at doing the same by combining, in the first case, an insult used in Spain with the name of *Einstein*, just as in English, and in the second case, combining the first part of a Spanish surname with another insult. The results of these domestications were *frikeinstein* and *Sr. Gañán*.

Next, there were several food references. The most problematic one was the *raisin bagel*, which it is not something seen in Spain. As the reference was made when talking about breakfast, it was substituted by *bizcocho*. The other two food references were translated taking into consideration the context they were used. The *cheese sandwich* was being used to describe the school who was barely a decent school, while the special pizza was describing her dream school, so the translator used local food references that could correspond to those values in Spain.

As for the school related vocabulary, there were several references to lockers, which is not something seen in grade – primary – school in Spain. Consequently, lockers were translated as *pupitres* (desks). The school years were also adapted to the Spanish system, and the names of the schools were substituted by names that could be seen in Spanish schools. Also related to the schools are the names that designate the different groups of

[5] This game, known in Spanish as Rummy, can be played either with cards or numbered tiles.

people. In Spanish schools there are not the kind of student groups that there are in the USA. Therefore, finding an appropriate name for them that is adequate for the Spanish culture was not that simple. In the end, the translation employed some names often used among students to designate some of them, which are an approximate interpretation of the ones in the English text.

Lastly, there is the matter of the games. The card games were easy to domesticate as it was simply a matter of finding games played in Spain that were similar to those named in English. The *four-square* game was adapted as *la rayuela*, since it is a popular game played in the school playground. And the game of baseball was translated as basketball, as it is more popular in Spain than baseball.

- *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*

In contrast to the previous story, *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* is more similar to the story of *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse* in terms of domestication. This story also takes place in an imaginary kingdom, and presents a very fairy-tale like setting. *Table 8* presents the elements that were domesticated and their Spanish adaptation.

The Twelve Dancing Princesses	Domesticated translation: Las doce princesas bailarinas
Val	Andrés
Aster	Azucena
Bluet	Belladona
Columbine	Clavel
Delphinium	Dalia
Eglantine	Estepa
Fleur	Fucsia
Gardenia	Gladiola
Heather	Hortensia
Iris	Ilusión
Jonquil	Jacinta[6]
Lily	Margarita
Mignonette	Nenúfar
Kumquat	Lavanda
Knotweed	Lila
Kestrel (Kestrel's Eye)	Lluvia (Lluvia de oro[7])
Bread and cheese	Latillas

Table 8: Domesticated translation of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*

[6] From the flower '*jacinto*'

[7] The scientif name of this flower is 'Laburnum anagyroides', also known as *'citiso'*.

The most relevant elements domesticated in this story are the names of the characters, but there was one reference to the food of the soldier that was also domesticated. Bread and cheese is usually associated in Spain with shepherds and not soldiers. For soldiers, tinned food is more typical, so that was the suggested translation.

And concerning the characters' names, the name of the soldier was easily adapted as Andrés, which means a brave and winning man; but the names of the princesses required more thought. As they are all names of flowers, names of flowers in Spanish were searched, and the decision to go with these flowers, which do not correspond to the flowers used in English, was based on the idea of choosing names that sounded Spanish. As the letter 'K' is not a common letter in Spanish, it was decided to skip a different letter in the list of the princesses' names and directly omit the letter 'K'. The letter chosen was the 'L', since there was a flower that allowed the possibility of making a similar wordplay as the one made in English, which is reflected in *Table 8*.

Next, an analysis taking into consideration how the translations here illustrated would modify the stories will be made. The analysis will compare how domesticated texts would be similar to retellings with the intention to prove that translating a text by domesticating it is another way to write a retelling. To do this, the comparisons previously made on section 5.3.2. on the differences and similarities between the original fairy tales and these retellings will be referenced, along with the techniques to write retellings that they illustrate and that were explained in section 3.2.

5.2.4. Domestication and retelling: comparison and comments

As explained in section 4, translation partly consists on interpreting and retelling. And the strategy of domesticating a text implies interpreting and adapting, which suggests that retelling and domestication follow similar schemes. This will be analysed by using the stories here translated.

The first thing to take into account is that the extreme use of a domestication strategy does not always produce the same level of domestication in every text. As seen in the tables above, each story may have more or less elements that can be subjected to this

strategy, depending on the cultural references the author has used, the setting or the characters themselves.

Out of the four stories, the one that would present the most domesticated translation would be *The Months of Manhattan*. The fact that the setting is clearly stated to be New York, and that numerous places of New York and other American cities are mentioned makes it easier to produce a locally domesticated translation. With a defined setting in English, it easier to define it in the domestication process too, which results in a completely localised text. The rest of the references, then, fit in perfectly with the setting once everything has been domesticated. This story could become a good example of how a text may be completely domesticated to make readers believe that what they are reading was written in that setting from the beginning.

The next degree of domestication can be seen in the story *Becoming Charise*. The modern setting facilitates the adaptation of the story to a Spanish setting, and yet as no distinct geographical data is provided by the original story the feeling that the domesticated story produces would not be the same as in the case of *The Months of Manhattan*. Nevertheless, as seen in the previous section, *Becoming Charise* has several elements, especially those related to the school, that when correctly adapted to the Spanish culture help for the story to gain a local Spanish feeling.

The stories *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse* and *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* are a different matter. As they take place in imaginary kingdoms that have no connection to the modern world, the cultural references and elements reduce mostly to the characters' names, as illustrated in *Table 6* and *Table 8*. As a result, the domestication of these stories would not be as large as the one done in the two previous tales. Moreover, the end result would look more like two stories with local characters, as the names would be completely domesticated, but that takes place in a fairy tale-like imaginary setting. Nevertheless, this domestication could be improved if the translator decided to remove that fairy tale-like setting and situate the story on a local landscape, even if no particular place is named.

Just as there are different degrees to which a story can be domesticated, there are different degrees to which a story can be retold. It should be noted that the story that presents the most changes once domesticated – *The Months of Manhattan* – is also one whose retelling is significantly different from the fairy tale it is based on, while the tale that would present the least changes after being domesticated – *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* – is also the one that has fewer differences between the original tale and its retelling.

Regarding the different degrees of retelling, *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* is the most similar one to the original tale because it follows the story in its entirety. The largest difference is the darker tone of the tale when describing the princesses' adventures. While the events are the same, the description of the events are more detailed and darker.

Although the tale of *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse* shares with *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* the fact that both keep the same setting as the classic fairy tale they are based on, the story of *Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse* changes the point of view employing the technique of the *fractured fairy tale*. This causes some of the main events, like the fate of Falada – as explained in section 5.2.2. – to change. For this reason, the degree of retelling that the tale presents, is greater than the degree of domestication that it would show.

Moving on to the two stories that use the device of modernization to retell the original fairy tale, the degree of retelling they present is the opposite to their respective degrees of domestication, as previously mentioned. This means that, while *The Months of Manhattan* has more elements that could be domesticated in the story, *Becoming Charise* presents more elements that have been retold.

The case of *Becoming Charise* consists on a complete retelling, as previously explained. The characters have been turned into humans, which in turn has changed the nature of the stories' events completely. *The Months of Manhattan*, in turn, employs the modernization of the setting to retell an old tale, while at the same time giving the characters a background and explaining the story with more detail.

All things considered, what these retelling techniques reflect is that in order to retell a story you only need to keep the basic idea of the original story intact. And even when most of the story is the same, and there is only a small detail that is new, it is enough to label that story as a retelling. Therefore, since domesticating a text changes details of the story like the characters' names or the settings, and these details are more than enough for something to be considered a retelling, it could be deduced that the extreme use of the domesticating strategy would be similar to writing a retelling. After all, the procedure followed in both is the same: changing and adapting the source text.

The four tales illustrate different techniques of retelling that, depending on the one employed, produce a final text closer to the original. The possibility of choosing how similar a retelling is going to be to its source text, is similar to the extent to which a text

can be domesticated, which strengthens the idea that both follow similar schemes. *Becoming Charise* was the example of a story completely retold, which would be the equivalent of the domesticated translations proposed by the fictional commission here devised. Conversely, a minimal retelling, exemplified by *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, could be the equivalent to a translation in which minimal use of the domestication strategy has been made. For instance, the translations presented in this TFM could be an example of this since only in the most necessary cases were elements slightly domesticated.

Additionally, a good example to support the idea that domesticating can be considered a way of retelling would be *The Months of Manhattan*, as the retelling itself is a kind of domestication of the original fairy tale. The author of that tale adapted the story, which happened in a forest, and moved it to her local setting, which would be New York. So in writing that retelling she was also domesticating it. Below, an example of what a paragraph of this story would look like completely domesticated in Spanish is included, so as to show in detail the similarities between retelling and domesticating a text:

> Isa vivía con su padre en un piso enorme del barrio de Salamanca, en la ciudad de Madrid. A veces pasaba una temporada con su madre en Barcelona o con su abuela en Alicante. Le gustaba ir al colegio. Todo era perfecto.

To sum up, if translation is partly retelling – as explained in section 4 – then, an extreme use of the domesticating technique should be just a translation were the retelling element is more predominant than the *carrying across* element. Consequently, domesticating a text in its whole would be similar to writing a retelling; it would simply be another version of a story, as shown here.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was twofold. On the one hand, it was to present a translation of four short stories never before translated, but on the other hand it was to try to see if a domesticated translation is a retelling, if both work in similar ways. To comply with these objectives, the present paper was divided into four different sections. The first three comprised the theoretical approach of the paper that illustrated firstly, the origin and evolution of fairy tales, as well as the presence of fairy tale retellings in today's world

and the main techniques used in their elaboration; and secondly, the relationship that exists between translation and retelling, and consequently, between domesticating a text and writing a retelling. The fourth section consisted on the practical part, which was divided in two different blocks: the translation itself of the stories, with information on the anthology they are included in and the editors, as well as the respective authors, and the problems found in the process of translation; and then, the analysis of the stories in terms of the similarities between retelling and domesticating.

The comparisons and analysis made have revealed that although in different degrees, retelling and domestication share many techniques, as they both consist on adapting the source story to a new set of circumstances by changing certain elements. As demonstrated by these stories, in order to write a retelling an author chooses an aspect they want to focus on, or stand out of the original story and write around that. And what happens in translation is that, as a text cannot be translated literally word by word, in order for the translation to make sense, sometimes it is necessary to keep some aspects, while at the same time adapt others.

Thus, since domesticating a text means adapting it to the target culture, and translation is partly retelling – as supported by different researchers – then, domestication would just be a way to retell a story in another language.

Additionally, the analysis showed that just like a story can be retold in different ways depending on the focus of the author and how faithful it wants to be to the original one, a translation can stray away from its source text too by choosing to interpret, adapt and retell more than necessary.

In section 3, the essence of retelling was described as *discovering a new take on a traditional story, while at the same time being able to identify the original one*. Consequently, following the line of though here stablished, the domestication strategy could be about discovering a new take on a foreign story, while at the same time still being able to identify it if the reader is familiar with the foreign version.

All in all, this paper accomplished to introduce the idea that domesticating and writing retellings are similar in more ways than one. Furthermore, it leaves open a line of investigation that could offer new insights on this particular translation strategy, and that could change the way this strategy is viewed.

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Appendix

The Months of Manhattan by Delia Sherman

Liz Wallach was a pretty good kid. She mostly did her homework on time and pretty much got along with her father and was usually polite to her girlfriends. She wasn't perfect, by any means. She had been known to lie about brushing her teeth and she couldn't for the life of her tell her left from her right. But for a ten-year-old, she wasn't bad.

Liz lived with her father in a big apartment on the Upper West Side of New York City. Sometimes she went to stay with her mother in San Francisco or her grandmother on Cape Cod. She liked school.

Things were good.

Then Beth Dodson came into her life.

Beth Dodson was the daughter of one of Dad's girlfriends. When the girlfriend became Liz's stepmother, Liz and Beth became stepsisters. Liz was ready to be happy about this. She'd always wanted a sister, and she kind of liked it that their real names were the same: Elizabeth.

But Beth had been perfectly happy being an only child, and she didn't like it at all that they had the same name. That was only one of the things she didn't like. She didn't like school and she didn't like Chinese food and she didn't like New York. It was big and noisy and dirty, and there were too many people living in it.

"Maybe she's shy," said Liz's father hopefully. "Maybe she'll get over it."

But Beth had no intention of getting over hating New York, or anything else. She whined constantly: about having to walk three blocks to the bus stop, about having ballet lessons at Mme. Demipointe's École de Danse.

She fought with her mother, and wouldn't speak to Liz or her stepfather except to say that she wished she were still living in New Rochelle with her daddy and playing soccer on Wednesday afternoons.

Things weren't so good anymore.

It was November, just before Thanksgiving vacation, when Liz got a special history assignment. She had to go to the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and look at the furniture and write a paper about it.

Liz's stepmother said, "I can take you while Bethy's in ballet class. You'll have to be quick, though. Mme. Demipointe hates to be kept waiting."

By the time Liz and her stepmother dropped Beth off at Mme. Demipointe's and got to the museum, it was about 3:00 P.M. Liz's stepmother paid for two admissions, went to the restaurant, sat down at a little round table, and took a magazine out of her bag.

"Aren't you coming with me?" Liz asked.

"It's your assignment," said her stepmother. "It's better if you do it yourself. And remember, we have to be at Madame's by four-thirty."

"But I don't know where—"

"I don't either," said her stepmother. "Ask."

By the time Liz found a guard who wasn't busy with someone else, ten minutes of her hour were gone. Then she turned left instead of right in the Medieval Treasury and got lost, and asked another guard and got lost again. Precious minutes ticked away as she walked through rooms of paintings and statues.

Finally, at 3:45, she walked up a flight of stairs and through a glass door, and found herself in a small, dark room with nothing in it but a big, bright picture.

Wherever she was, it wasn't the American Wing.

Liz wasn't much of a crier as a general rule, but this was too much. Even if she started back now and didn't get lost once, she'd be late, and her stepmother would be madder than a taxi driver in a traffic jam and her assignment still wouldn't be done. "I must be just about the unluckiest person in the world,"she wailed.

"Whatsa matter, kid?"

The voice was friendly, with a heavy Bronx accent. Liz wiped her face on her sleeve and looked around for a guard, but she was alone.

The painting caught her eye.

It showed the statue of Atlas at Rockefeller Center with twelve people standing and sitting around it. They were all ages, from a very little girl in a snowsuit with cat ears to an old

man in a wheelchair, and all the races Liz had ever heard of, except maybe Native American. They were wearing all kinds of different clothes, too, from a little Hispanic boy in snow boots and a ski jacket to a young, white guy in Bermuda shorts. A pretty African-American woman in a sundress opened her painted lips and said,

"What is it, honey? Maybe we can help."

Liz's heart started to beat very fast. She was startled, but not frightened. She'd read lots of books in

which things like this happened. "I'm lost," she said.

"We also," said a Pakistani boy in baggy jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. "But you have found us."

Liz thought about this. "Would you like me to tell the guard you're here?"

The old man in the wheelchair laughed. He was pale and thin as a china cup, but his laugh was warm and strong. "No. Thank you. We prefer to be found by chance."

"Oh," Liz said, and glanced at her watch: 3:40. She'd thought it was later.

"What time of year is it?" The question came from an Asian girl about Liz's age, dressed in a red slicker and boots and flowered mittens.

"November," said Liz.

"I hate November," the girl said, and stuck out her tongue at an old African-American woman leaning on a cane.

"It's not so bad," said Liz. "There's Thanksgiving and hot apple cider, and we get to go to Grandma's. And then it's almost December, and that means Christmas and I can go sledding in Central Park with Dad." She remembered Beth and sighed. "If he still wants to."

"January, though," remarked a middle-aged Latino man in an embroidered short-sleeved shirt.

"January is very terrible."

"And February, and March," added a skinny, unshaven man dressed in layers and layers of brown jackets.

“I kind of like February and March,” Liz said. “I like getting cold and wet and then coming in and getting warm and looking at the lights out the window. It’s easier to go to school in winter, too. You don’t want to be outdoors so much, unless it’s snowing, of course.”

“Of course,” said a woman with a prayer shawl around her shoulders. “But April, you know what they say about April, no? April is the cruelest month, that’s what they say.”

“April showers bring May flowers,” said Liz. “Besides, I like mud and the way it smells.”

“Even in Central Park?” asked an old Hispanic woman with a cane.

“Especially in Central Park.”

“And the summer?” asked a teenage girl with her hair in a million little braids and flowers painted on her nails.

“Oh, summer is neat,” said Liz. “May and June can be hard because I want to be outside all the time and there’s still school, but it smells so good and the days are getting longer and there’s summer vacation coming and we go to Cape Cod, and that’s the best.”

“So you must hate the fall,” said a little African-American boy in a very big parka.

“Not really,” said Liz. “I miss my friends over the summer, and there’s my birthday in October, and I love the leaves turning all red and gold and—” she stopped suddenly. “Listen. This is way cool, but I’m really late, and my stepmother is going to kill me. I really have to go.”

“I think we can take care of that for you,” said the young guy in shorts. “Can’t we, September?”

The woman smoothed her prayer shawl. “I think we should, June. And the history assignment as well.” She caught sight of Liz’s face and laughed kindly. “We can’t do it for you—that wouldn’t be kosher. But we can give you the time to do it in. And directions to the American Wing.”

“Bye-bye,” said the little girl in the snowsuit. “Good luck.”

And they were gone.

Oh, there was still a painting on the wall, but it was just a big canvas with bright blobs on it that only looked like people if you stood back and squinted hard. The plaque on the

wall beside it read: THE TWELVE MONTHS OF MANHATTAN. PETER MINUIT. UNDATED.

Liz looked at her watch. It was 3:05 P.M. She had fifty-five minutes before her stepmother would be looking for her. She ran straight to the American Wing without taking one wrong turn, and looked at the furniture and took notes for her paper until her watch said 3:50, when she walked back to the restaurant without even having to ask for directions. It was magical.

As Liz came up to her stepmother's table, she looked at her watch. "Four o'clock exactly," she said, surprised. "Lucky for you, you made it."

Outside, it was raining, a cold, thick November rain. There wasn't a taxi to be seen, and lots of people were waiting.

"We're going to be hours late picking Beth up," Liz's stepmother moaned.

Just then, a taxi pulled up right in front of Liz. The door opened, the passenger got out, and Liz's stepmother nipped right in, with Liz on her heels. Liz's stepmother told the taxi where they were going, and sat back as the traffic miraculously cleared to let them through. "What a piece of luck!" she exclaimed.

Liz hung on to her notebook and grinned.

From that moment on, things got much, much better.

Not only did taxis stop whenever Liz needed one, she always made it to the bus stop just when the bus was pulling up to it. Her dad gave her a sled for Christmas, and her stepmother liked the scarf Liz knitted for her. And she never, ever lost a card game. Old Maid, Go Fish, War—anything where luck counted, Liz just couldn't lose.

"Not again!" her stepmother groaned as Liz stripped her of her hoarded sixes and triumphantly laid down all her own cards.

"Look at the bright side, dear," said her father. "If we need money, we can just send her to buy a lottery ticket."

"I'm only ten," Liz objected. "They wouldn't sell me one."

Beth's mother glanced at Beth, who was looking as gloomy as the East River in the rain. "I'm tired of cards," she said.

“Monopoly!” Beth’s stepfather said cheerfully, and got out the board. “I’ll take the top hat. I never lose a game when I have the top hat.”

He lost this game, though. Liz won it, mostly because she landed on Boardwalk, Park Place, and all the Railroads her first time around the board.

“Lucky stiff,” her father said.

“Too lucky,” Beth muttered, and went off to think about it. Ever since that trip to the museum in November, Liz had been luckier than any human being had a right to be. Something had to have happened, something magic. It wasn’t fair. Nice things were always happening to Liz, and only bad things happened to her.

Later, Beth challenged Liz to a game of Paper, Scissors, Stone. Unable to think of a reason not to, Liz agreed. Seven times, the stepsisters chanted, “One, Two Three, Go.” Seven times, Liz won.

“That’s not luck, that’s magic,” Beth said accusingly. “You have to tell me what happened. I want to be lucky, too.”

Liz thought about lying, but it just didn’t seem right. Beth wouldn’t find the Months of Manhattan unless they wanted her to. And if she did find them, Liz was sure they’d be able to handle one eleven year- old girl, even one as whiny and annoying as Beth.

So she told her stepsister all about getting really lost, and stumbling into a room with a magic picture in it. She would have told her all about the Seasons, but Beth didn’t want to hear about it.

“I’m not a total idiot,” she said. “If you tell me everything, it’ll ruin the magic, right? I hate you, Liz Wallach.”

Next day, Beth announced at dinner that her history teacher had given her the now-famous American Wing furniture assignment. It was due Monday.

“But the museum’s a madhouse on weekends,” her mother objected.

“We can make a family outing of it,” said her stepfather. “It’ll be fun.”

Beth pouted. “I want to do it by myself.”

Her stepfather said, “Good for you, Bethy. We’ll turn you into a New Yorker yet. I tell you what. We’ll all go to the museum, and you can go to the American Wing and the rest of us will look at armor or something and we’ll all meet in the restaurant for lunch.”

And that was what they did. Liz, her dad, and Beth's mother went off one way, and Beth went off in another. She'd never liked going to the museum, so it wasn't very long before she was as lost and frightened as the most demanding magic would wish. The museum was, as her mother had predicted, a madhouse. Everywhere she turned, people bumped into her and glared at her. Thinking of nothing but finding somewhere quiet, she ran up a back stairway and through a glass door and found herself in a small, dark room with nothing in it but a large, bright picture.

In her fear, Beth had almost forgotten what had brought her to the museum. Almost, but not quite. She stared at the picture to see if it looked magic. It didn't. What could be magic about a bunch of street people sitting around a stupid statue?

"It was a dumb idea, anyway," she said aloud. "Everyone knows there's no such thing as magic."

"Who says?"

Beth jumped. One of the people in the painting, a dark brown boy about her age in huge, baggy jeans, was scowling at her.

Beth said, "Remember my stepsister, Liz? She was here in November. You made her lucky."

Next to a guy in bermuda shorts was an African-American girl with long nails and lots of braids.

"November," she said. "I know November. Is it still winter, out there in the world?"

Beth shook her head scornfully. "You guys are supposed to be magic, right? And you don't even know what month it is? It's December, for your information, and it's cold and wet, and I hate it."

"What about Christmas, and the snow?" asked the young guy in shorts.

"It doesn't snow in New York, not a real snow like at home. It just turns into slush and puddles that get into your boots. And Christmas isn't the same without Daddy. I hate winter here, every bit of it."

"And spring?" asked an old bum wearing about a million raggedy jackets.

"It never gets warm until June, and then it gets hot and muggy, and you can smell the garbage and you never feel clean. And then it gets cold again, just like that, and starts

raining again, and there aren't even any pretty leaves to look at, like there are at home. I hate it. I hate it all."

The Months exchanged silent looks.

"Well," said the woman in the prayer shawl. "We certainly know where you stand." Her voice was angry, in a cool sort of way.

Beth scowled. "You *asked*," she whined. "That's how I feel. I can't help it if you don't like it. Now you'll probably do something awful to me. It's not fair."

"Don't you worry, honey," said an African-American woman in a sundress. "We're going to give you exactly what you need. And I don't want to hear any of your sass, April."

The baggy-jeans boy shrugged and grinned.

The old man in the wheelchair lifted a hand like a white claw and said, "The luck you have asked for is yours. Now go."

Beth felt a giant hand shove her out of the little room. It kept on shoving her, right and left through the Saturday crowds, until she was, if possible, even more lost than she had been before. And then it left her, in the farthest corner of European Decorative Arts, in a room full of cloudy glass cups.

By the time Beth had found her way back to the restaurant, she was nearly an hour late. Her mother and stepfather, who had been wondering if she'd been kidnapped, were pretty mad when she showed up safe and sound. When they found out that she didn't have any notes on American furniture, they were even madder. And when she unluckily let slip that she didn't really have a paper due Monday, they were mad enough to fight all the lions in the Bronx Zoo and win.

The only person who wasn't mad at Beth was Liz. At first, it was because she thought that having major bad luck served Beth right. But before long, she started to feel sorry for her. Anyone would.

Beth couldn't walk down the street without stepping in chewing gum or doggy doo. Streetlights turned red when she came to the corner, and buses pulled away just as she got to the stop. When it rained, her umbrella inevitably blew inside out, and taxis going too fast splashed her with dirty water.

She caught every cold that was going around, and in April, she sprained her ankle in ballet class. In June, she came down with the measles.

At first, all the bad luck made Beth meaner than ever. She was especially mean to Liz, who she blamed for ruining her life.

"It's pretty awful," Liz agreed. "But I bet there's a way to break the curse—there usually is, in fairy tales. Maybe if you apologized to the Months. Or at least made it up to them somehow."

"Apologize?" growled Beth. "Why should I apologize? They're the ones who should apologize, for doing this to me. You're a creep." She made a grab at Liz's braid, missed, and fell out of bed onto Barbie's Dream House, scraping her arm painfully.

"Oh, poor Beth," said Liz. "But it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't tried to pull my hair. Think about it."

Beth was too miserable to answer her. But later, when the measles were itching like crazy and even her mother didn't want to keep her company, she thought about what Liz had said. What were the old man's words? "The luck you have asked for is yours." Maybe she had hurt the Months' feelings. Maybe there was something nice about June in New York she just hadn't noticed.

She looked out the window. The sky was clear, a deep turquoise blue that made the buildings across the street look bright and sharp. A pigeon landed on her windowsill with a flutter of gray wings and cooed at her.

Okay. Maybe June in New York wasn't so bad after all.

Once Beth had noticed the pigeon and the sky, she began to notice other things. She noticed that her mother kept bringing her food and books even when Beth threw them on the floor. She noticed that the rocks Liz brought her from Central Park had chips of mica in them that sparkled like tiny diamonds. She noticed that her stepfather always came into her room as soon as he got home from work and told her how they'd all go to Cape Cod in July and build sand castles together. She noticed that she kind of liked it when he did that.

By the time she was over her measles and everyone went to Cape Cod, she didn't hate New York City nearly as much as she had. What's more, she could find both her shoes

when she needed them, and the tunnels under her sand castles didn't cave in, and the sand fleas bit everyone in the family, not just her.

It was like magic. By the time school started in the fall, Beth was down to little things that could happen to anyone, like losing pencils and leaving her gloves in taxis. She pretty much got along with Liz and was usually nice to her stepfather and mostly did her homework on time. She tried Chinese food and discovered that she liked it. In fact, Beth Dodson had become a pretty good kid.

That Thanksgiving, Beth and Liz decided to go back to the Metropolitan Museum to find the Twelve Months of Manhattan and thank them. But although the sisters did their best to get lost, they never found the back stairs that led to a small, dark room with nothing in it but a big, bright picture.

Falada: The Goose Girl's Horse by Nancy Farmer

My troubles began when the queen of Elfland put Conrad on my back. As a fairy horse I was used to strange riders. The queen often asked me to carry royal guests. *Asked* me, you understand. I was no bumbling farm horse. The queen would say, "*Dear* Falada. Would you mind taking this dwarf (or gnome or goblin) for a tour of the royal gardens!"

And I would say, "Of course!" unless it was a goblin. Some of them like to chew on ears.

I was a beautiful mare. I had silvery-white hair and a long, silver mane. My golden horseshoes were fastened with diamond nails, and when I galloped, sparks flew up from my feet. Right in the middle of my forehead was a gray circle. It was exactly where a horn would have grown, if I'd been a unicorn. My great-grandfather on my mother's side *was* a unicorn.

So you see I was no ordinary horse. And when the queen put Conrad on my back—without asking! —I was insulted. First, I should explain about Conrad. He was a human child. Every now and then the elves carry off a baby they find interesting. They call it *borrowing*, but I call it *stealing*. They keep this child until they get bored with it. Then they return it to the poor mother.

By that time the child has learned bad habits. The elves spoil it rotten. They feed it candy instead of fruit, never send it to bed on time, and give in to it every time it throws a temper tantrum. And believe me, those brats know how to throw tantrums.

Conrad was eight years old and no longer cute. The queen was tired of his screaming fits, so she put him on my back and said, “Take him around the garden. Don’t throw him off, either. I know your tricks.”

She was annoyed at me because I had dumped a pair of gnomes into a rosebush the week before. I couldn’t see what the fuss was about. Everyone knows gnomes bounce. I trotted off with Conrad clinging to my mane. His fingers were sticky with chocolate.

“Don’t hang on to me,” I said.

“Make me stop,” jeered Conrad.

“Good riders hold on with their knees,” I explained patiently.

Conrad gave a vicious tug to my mane. “I could pull this out,” he said. “I could stuff a pillow with it.”

“You already have a pillow,” I told the little monster.

“Maybe I want another one.” He yanked so hard, I saw stars. I actually felt a clump of my beautiful, silver mane being torn out! I stopped short, kicked up my heels, and tossed Conrad into the thorniest rosebush in the garden.

You could hear him scream all the way to the goblin king’s palace in the mountains. He was only bleeding in a dozen or so places, but the queen was furious. “I’m sick of all the noise around here,” she cried. “You, Falada, will be given a task among humans. If you do it well, I *might* let you return. And you, Conrad, are going straight back to your mother.”

I felt sick. I was being banished from Elfland. Every now and then a fairy animal is given a task in the real world. That’s where all those magic foxes, firebirds, and talking fish come from. The task is always unpleasant.

An Elf lord put a rope around my neck and took me along the misty road that leads to the real world. The first thing I noticed was the dirt crunching beneath my feet. Then I felt my first horsefly bite. The sun was too hot, the grass too dry, the water too muddy.

I saw myself in a stream. My golden horseshoes were gone. My silver hair had turned gray. Oh, woe, woe, woe! I was no better than a mangy plow horse on a turnip farm.

My task was to carry the princess Belinda to her future husband in the next kingdom. "Watch over her," whispered Belinda's mother, who knew I was a fairy horse. "She's a sweet girl, but rather foolish."

The old queen sighed. "I suppose I babied her too much."

My heart sank when I saw Belinda. She was a soft, pretty child. She cried when a bird flew into the courtyard and snapped up a grasshopper. "Do something," she wept, wringing her hands.

"There, there," said the old queen. "The bird is only taking food home to her babies."

We started out. I walked carefully with the princess Belinda on my back. Behind me came a handsome black horse with Belinda's serving maid, Dagmar. Belinda clapped her hands when she saw anything new. Everything was a delight to her. She liked the trees and the squirrels that chattered at us from the branches. Every flower filled her with joy.

Dagmar, on the other hand, hated everything. She thought squirrels were only good for squirrel pie, and that trees should be chopped up for firewood. "This forest is probably full of bears," she sniffed.

"How I'd love to see a cuddly, wuddly little bear! Do they really drink honey?" cried Belinda.

"They eat people and drink blood," said Dagmar.

That shut Belinda up for a while, but soon she was warbling again. Everything was new to her, you see. She was a kind, happy girl.

When we got to the first stream, Princess Belinda said, "Dear Dagmar, could you bring me a cup of water?"

"Get it yourself. You aren't lame," said Dagmar.

"Don't let her get away with that," I told Belinda. "You're going to be a queen someday. You must learn to give orders." But the girl was too afraid. She climbed down from the saddle and fetched her own water.

Later in the day we came to another stream. "Dearest, dearest Dagmar. Would you mind *terribly much* getting me a cup of water?" asked Princess Belinda.

"Of course I mind *terribly much*," said Dagmar. So the princess climbed down and fetched her own water.

That night Dagmar refused to cook dinner or wash dishes or make up beds. Each time, I told the princess, "Don't let her get away with that." And each time, Belinda wrung her hands and cried.

I gave up and joined the black horse under a tree. "Things aren't working out at all," I muttered to myself.

"Things are working out fine," the black horse replied.

I was amazed. Another talking horse! "Are you from Elfland?" I asked.

"Hardly. My mistress and I come from the goblin king's palace in the mountains."

So that explained it. Dagmar was a goblin. No wonder she was so angry and rude.

In the morning, Dagmar made Belinda take off her beautiful golden dress and put on rags. She smeared Belinda's face and hair with mud. "There! No one will ever know you're a princess. If you tell on me, I'll chop you into little pieces. And if *you* tell on me, Falada, I'll have your head cut off." Neither Belinda nor I doubted her for a second.

Dagmar put on the golden dress. When we got to the neighboring kingdom, the old king and his son Humbert came out to greet us. Prince Humbert was delighted with Dagmar. "You're more beautiful than I expected," he cried.

"And you're dumber than I expected," said Dagmar with a sweet smile. Prince Humbert didn't even care that she had insulted him. He had fallen head over heels in love with her. He was the kind of prince who liked being pushed around.

"What shall we do with your serving maid?" asked the old king.

"Oh, her! She's so foolish, she's only good for herding geese," sneered Dagmar.

So Belinda was taken off to a goose farm, and I was chained to a millstone at a mill. Round and round I trudged, grinding grain into flour. My hooves wore down from all the walking. My tail became tangled and full of burrs, and my bones stuck out under my dusty, dirty skin. I looked *worse* than a mangy plow horse on a turnip farm.

Every day Belinda came by with a herd of geese. With her—I could hardly believe it—was Conrad, who had got me into trouble in the first place. His mother had hired him out to the goose farmer.

"Hello, Falada. You look awful," the little monster said happily.

"Geese, geese, hiss and fight. Give Conrad a nasty bite," I chanted. I might be banished, but I was still a fairy horse. I knew a little magic. The geese flapped their wings and nipped Conrad's behind. He ran off screaming loud enough to be heard in the goblin king's palace in the mountains.

"Poor Falada, you look so unhappy," sighed Princess Belinda.

"You, too," I said.

"Alas, alas, if mother knew, I fear her heart would break in two," the princess said. "I'd better get these geese to the meadow before they get into more mischief." She herded them onward with a little switch cut from a willow tree.

As time passed, I noticed a change in Belinda. She no longer wrung her hands and wept. In fact, Belinda was learning a great many things from the goose farmer and the goose farmer's wife. Now she could bake bread and grow vegetables. She could shear a sheep and take an egg away from a hen without getting pecked. The more Belinda learned, the more confident she became.

Every day she came past the mill yard and brought me a bunch of carrots or an apple. I, in turn, taught her how to get rid of Conrad. He had a habit of pulling out strands of her long, golden hair to make fishing lures. Now, when he crept up on her, she chanted, *"Blow, wind, with all your might. Blow Conrad's hat right out of sight."* He spent the rest of the afternoon running all over the meadow after his hat. Finally, though, Conrad got angry. He waited outside the back door of the palace until the old king

came out to sun himself in the garden. "Sir! Sir!" the boy called. "Please listen to me, sir!"

The old king had twelve sons and liked children. "Come here, lad," he said kindly. "What's your problem?"

"It's that nasty goose girl," said Conrad. "Every day she does a magic trick. She has the wind blow my hat all over the meadow. She talks to a horse, too, *and it talks back.* I think she's a witch, sir."

"Well, well. A talking horse. That's something I have to see," said the old king.

Early the next morning he came to the mill yard and sat on a stone. He was dressed like a farmer, but I knew exactly what he was. You don't grow up in Elfland without learning who's a king and who isn't. Quite soon Belinda came by with her herd of geese. Conrad

was bouncing up and down with pure glee. He saw the old king on the stone. “Poor Falada, you look so unhappy,” sighed the princess.

“You, too,” I replied.

“Alas, alas, if mother knew, I fear her heart would break in two.”

Then the devil got into me. *“Geese, geese, hiss and fight. Give Conrad a nasty bite,”* I chanted. Straight off, the geese flapped their wings and nipped Conrad’s behind. He ran off screaming loud enough to be heard in the goblin king’s palace in the mountains.

The old king laughed so hard, he almost fell off his stone. “That’s something you don’t see every day,” he wheezed. “Come on now, you two. Tell me how a fairy horse and a most unusual goose girl landed in my back- yard.”

But both Belinda and I were afraid to speak. We knew Prince Humbert was married to a goblin.

Belinda didn’t want to be chopped into pieces, and I didn’t want my head cut off. “Well, sir, it’s difficult to say,” I began.

“We promised not to tell,” said Belinda.

The old king looked from one of us to the other. “I see you are afraid. Well, well. I don’t know what to do about that.”

Suddenly Belinda straightened her backbone. “I’m through with being a coward,” she said. “I’ve stayed up all night with the lambs when they were sick. I’ve brought horses to the barn during a thunderstorm. *They* were frightened, but I didn’t have time for it.”

“Spoken like a true princess,” said the old king, smiling.

So then Belinda told him about the trip through the forest and how she was forced to change clothes with the goblin. The old king stood up in a towering rage. He strode off to the palace, calling for his guards, his soldiers and his executioner.

But by the time he got there, Dagmar was gone. In the way goblins have of knowing when to flee, Dagmar had saddled up her handsome black horse and taken off for the mountains as fast as she could go. Oh, and she took Prince Humbert with her. He was still in love with her, goblin or not. Besides, he liked the way she ordered him around.

Princess Belinda married his little brother Prince Herkimer instead. He was second in line and had a much better character.

I was allowed to return to Elfland. As I crossed over the border, my cracked hooves became smooth again. My hair turned from gray to silver, and my skin became sleek and fat. “It’s great to be back,” I sighed. When I got to the queen’s palace, I saw she had visitors.

They were Dagmar, Prince Humbert, and that wickedly handsome black horse. Dagmar had changed, too, when she crossed over the border to Elfland. She looked exactly like a goblin, which meant she was pea green and had a fine pair of tusks on either side of her nose.

“Things worked out after all,” I told the black horse.

“Well, of course,” he snorted. “Your job was to take the princess to her new kingdom. *My* job was to see she got some sense before she became a queen. You weren’t the only one who was given a task.”

And we went off to the garden together before anyone could ask us for a ride.

Becoming Charise by Kathe Koja

In the back of the school bus, hunched next to a window smeared and cloudy with breath, sketchbook open on her knees: Charise. Sitting alone; again; always. Imagining the world.

“Hey, Nerdstein,” Tibb Gleason said, shoving her shoulder, ruining her pencil’s line. “Draw a picture of this.”

Charise bit her lip, erased the mark, started drawing again. Not the world around her, the world as it was, but her world, the way she imagined things could be. A world where no one hurt animals, or polluted the water and skies. A world where no one hurt anyone, where no one called names, where girls could wear oversized red sweatshirts printed with pictures of Albert Einstein and not get called a nerd. Or a geek. Or worse. All the time.

Charise wondered if Einstein had ever been called a nerd.

She had read everything she could find about Albert Einstein: how he had decided, at age twelve, to solve the riddle of the “huge world” all around him. How he was such a crappy student, he left school at fifteen. How four papers he wrote, scientific papers, did more to solve that riddle than anyone before or since. Charise thought he might be a kind of saint, a saint of knowing, if there was such a thing.

Charise loved knowing things, how things worked, what they did; she knew that Knowing was the first step to Becoming.

"I want to Become," she told her Aunt Tamara. Breakfast, the windows dark around them; raisin bagels and orange juice fluorescent in her glass. Beneath the chair, her mutt terrier, Dino, waited for the usual crumbs.

Aunt Tamara poured herself some orange juice, sliced a bagel with one swift swipe. "Become what?

You could be an artist, with all that drawing you do. Or maybe a scientist. Or an engineer—"

"I don't mean that," Charise said. "I mean . . . I just want to Become." Become what I am, she wanted to say, but didn't know how. Like a caterpillar is a butterfly, somewhere inside its genes; like an atom splits. Like a piece of paper and a Number Two pencil are a drawing, when they meet a particular hand and eye, when all of it finally gets together, to Become what it somehow was, all along, forever... Aunt Tamara was smiling at her.

"You want another bagel?"

Dino put up his pointy little ears; Charise shook her head. "I gotta go."

"I'll see you after work," Aunt Tamara said.

On the bus, Charise had to squeeze past some seventh graders, big girls in bright parkas, pink and green. In seventh grade they did a science unit on Einstein; that was something to wait for, a bright marker on the dull road of the days. Maybe it would be different if she were somewhere else, a different road, but Jackson was a school like a cheese sandwich was a meal; it would get you by, but that was all.

Not a hot pepperoni pizza, like, say, the Bayley Academy. Charise had heard about Bayley: A couple kids from Jackson—smart kids; lucky kids—had gone there. It lived in her mind like a moon, bright and unreachable, something to consider at night.

But today was orange juice and bagels and the bus, the jostling halls of Jackson, trying not to mind that she had no locker partner, trying to get through the day.

It had always been hard for Charise to fit in. Too wild for the smart kids, too smart for the wild kids, as if school were one kind of puzzle, and she was a piece from another box. Don't you want to go out and play? Aunt Tamara used to ask her as she sat with cookies

or a Coke, legs hooked around the kitchen chair, Dino alert beneath. Or maybe ask a friend over?

I don't have any friends, she said in her head, but to Aunt Tamara she would say, "Not today," or, "Not right now." In grade school most of the kids had seemed silly, babyish, but, still, it hurt to stand and watch as they played soccer or four-square, or walked home together after school. She kept hoping that one day things might be different —"You wait," Aunt Tamara kept telling her, "things will change for you, you'll see"—but, still, they were the same. And the hurt was the same, a dark, dry ache not in her center but deeper, as if she were a kind of funnel, and the emptiness before the bottom was part of the hurting, too.

I'm just different, Charise told herself, biting her lip. I bet Einstein was different, too.

At Jackson there were three groups of kids. The largest was the Regulars, the middle-of-theroaders, who moved past Charise in the stream of the hall like boats around a buoy, avoiding her without effort, without even seeing she was there. In the lunchroom, hunched over her sketchbook at the end of the unpopular kids' table, where Clarissa and DeeDee and DeJuan played their endless games of Hearts or Bump Rummy, she sometimes heard, "Hey, Geekstein!" from one of the Regulars, calling out to make the others laugh: mean, but not too mean, the way they might use a magnifying glass to burn up ants on the sidewalk, never thinking it might hurt the ants to be killed.

But the kids who did think, the smart kids, were always busy with stuff like student council, or the school newspaper, or the debate group, things Charise didn't want to do. And, anyway, they didn't want to hang out with her, either; they respected her for her brains, but that was all. Respect is different from being friends: You can respect someone you don't even like.

And the third group, the outsiders, the wild kids like Tibb Gleason—they always sat in the back, sniggering to each other and writing swear words in their books, or on the desks for other kids to find later. They ignored Charise unless they needed a quiz answer, then called her a bitch if she wouldn't give it to them.

Which she wouldn't. "You want to know the answer?" she would whisper, very low, so her lips barely moved and the teacher couldn't see. "Then study." Why should they sponge off her hard work?

Every night she took home books, she went to the library, she went on the Net on her Aunt Tamara's computer: "What are you doing?" Aunt Tamara would call from the living room, where she sat with her own books, her night school work. "Are you online?"

"I'm downloading some stuff," Charise would call back. "For school." Mostly it wasn't for school, it was for herself, things she wanted to know about, but Aunt Tamara didn't mind. She said learning was learning. Mr. Mahfouz said the same thing.

Mr. Mahfouz was the sixth-grade science teacher. Some kids called him Mr. MahFool, but most of the kids liked him: He told jokes, he brought in laser games and giant Slinkys, he didn't care if you laughed or shouted out. Sometimes he wore funny T-shirts under his sport coat, or a baseball cap with a cardinal on it, for some sports team he liked. All sports were a closed book to Charise, but Mr. Mahfouz talked about the physics of baseball; he could find science in anything. Even TV.

"Your mission," he told the class that day, "is to find science on TV. Or in a TV: Cut it up, dissect it, see what you get. And then tell me all about it in a report. No less than five pages, at least three illustrations. That means pictures, guys."

Most of the kids watched nature shows; a few rented videos and brought them in. Mark Carver, who was editor of the school paper, did a newspaper story, with three photographs, of him and his friends "dissecting" a TV with a screwdriver. Charise did her report on the science of TV—what made it work, why you saw a picture when you clicked the remote. "This is dynamite," Mr. Mahfouz said, and put up her report in the showcase at the front of the room. "Charise, come see me after class."

"Dynamite you, Geekstein," said Tibb Gleason when Charise sat down again.

When the day was over, she came back to Mr. Mahfouz, who sat behind his desk, sorting papers.

Lockers click-and-banging, a faraway shout in the hall; the school grew quiet as she waited. Finally, Mr. Mahfouz said "Finished," setting the papers aside. "Sorry it took so long. . . . You know, your report was really excellent, Charise. Even for you."

Charise nodded, watchful. She knew more was coming.

"Do you like it here, at Jackson?" Did she like it? What kind of a question was that? "Reason I ask," he said, "is there's a couple of placements opening up at Bayley—the Bayley Academy, ever heard of it? —and I'd like to sponsor you for one of them." From

the papers on his desk he chose two, along with a brochure, slick and glossy like a magazine. “Take that home, let your folks have a look at it and, if you’re interested, we’ll talk some more.”

THE BAYLEY ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCE: slim black letters on a cool blue background, lots of stuff about academic excellence, a world of learning. And lots of pictures: of kids in a laboratory, kids on a stage, kids with computers; lots of computers. This was no cheese sandwich. It was a big, juicy pizza with everything, the kind of place Einstein would have loved.

Charise kept the brochure hidden in her backpack, as if it might be taken from her, or vanish like a magic trick; she read it like the Bible, she read it for a week, looking at the kids, the labs, the computers

—

“I’d like to sponsor you . . .”

no more Tibb Gleason, no more Geekstein

a world of learning

Aunt Tamara you have to say yes

—until at last, at Friday dinner, trying her best to sound casual: “From Mr. Mahfouz,” Charise said, sliding the brochure across the table. “He said to show it to you; he said he’d sponsor me if I wanted.”

Fork in hand but she could not eat, could not swallow, could barely breathe as she watched Aunt Tamara read the whole thing, even the papers inside. Dino shuffled beneath her chair; the dinner grew cold. Finally, Aunt Tamara looked up, without a smile. “Honey,” she said, in a voice like lead, “smart as you are, I don’t know if this is the place for you. The kids would be—very different from what you’re used to.”

Charise felt her heart beating, a hard, red drum: like an atom, splitting. Her mouth was open, but Aunt Tamara was still talking. “—way across town, there’s no school bus to get you there, and I have to be at work by—”

From inside the drum, the atom, her voice dry and far away: “I could ride my bike.”

“It’s across town, Charise. And what about wintertime?”

“I could, I could take a regular bus, I could walk—” but Aunt Tamara was shaking her head, she was closing the brochure, she was saying, “Charise, honey, I’m sorry,” but Charise was already gone, away, slamming her bedroom door, crouching on the floor with her arms clenched around her body till she was dark and hard and small; like a rock: like a seed. She was crying, but she didn’t know it.

I want to Become. I want to Become.

She would ride her bike, take a bus, walk if she had to, walk every mile there and back. She would go to Bayley, she would become Einstein, she would—

“Charise?”

Hard and dark: her arms were cramping: her legs had fallen asleep. Aunt Tamara’s knock was as gentle as her voice: “Charise, please, open the door.”

“No,” she said, but now she knew she was crying, felt the tears like lines on her face, felt their salt and cloudy heat; their elements, Mr. Mahfouz would say. She cried until she thought she was empty, then cried a little more. The door nudged open a crack: Dino, come to lie beside her in the darkness.

She was still crying when at last she fell asleep.

“Your aunt called me,” said Mr. Mahfouz as soon as Charise walked into class; he looked sad. “Can you stop in after school for a minute?”

“Sure.” No tears today, Charise kept her face still, kept her hands in her pockets as Mr. Mahfouz talked: Your aunt said, so and so and so on, watching her face as he spoke. “I have to tell you,” he said at last, slumping a little in his rolling chair, “I’m pretty disappointed. What about you?” His face looked tired, like a helium balloon the day after the party, as if something good had gone out of him.

“Yeah,” Charise said, “I am.” She shrugged a little, a thin motion. “So what.”

“So I guess we’ll have to do the best we can, you and me.” Mr. Mahfouz sighed. “You know the story of the ugly duckling?”

She nodded, sharp, almost rude with the weight of her heart inside her. All she wanted now was for him to stop talking so she could get away, get her coat, get out of this crappy school for today, at least ... but Mr. Mahfouz was waiting for an answer, so, “Yeah,” she

said, looking not at him but out the window, into the gray slant of afternoon sun. “He grew up to be a swan, or something. So what.”

“So he never was a duckling in the first place,” Mr. Mahfouz said. His voice was calm now, and very precise, the way it was when he was explaining something, something he expected them to get. Her to get. “He was going to become a swan. No matter where he went, no matter what he did—it was in his genes, Charise, you understand what I’m saying?”

“I understand,” she said, still wanting to get away, wishing she was in her room, wishing she could find Einstein and tell him her problems, tell him how much she wished she could

become

what she was meant to be, what she was inside—

a swan.

Like a pencil and some paper is a picture; like a caterpillar is a buttefly. Like she was what she was, Charise, part of a puzzle that was not the puzzle she knew, but still part of something bigger: a different puzzle, somewhere else. Maybe at Bayley, or maybe not. Did it matter? In the end, it probably didn’t matter.

It was in his genes, Charise, you understand what I’m saying?

“Charise?” said Mr. Mahfouz, leaning forward, arms on the desk, and, “Yes,” she said, because she got it now, she knew why he was smiling; she was smiling, too. Not a big smile but a bright one, like a little moon a million miles away, getting bigger as you get closer to it, and, “You know,” said Mr. Mahfouz, “you can always try again next year. For Bayley, I mean. Your aunt might—”

“Einstein dropped out of school,” Charise said. Now her smile was a grin.

Mr. Mahfouz laughed. “You don’t have to do everything Einstein did,” he said.

On the bus, Tibb Gleason stuck his foot out in the aisle, but Charise stepped over it as if it wasn’t there; quack, quack, she thought. Quack you, Tibb Gleason. Plopping down into the seat, she took out her sketchbook and spent the ride home drawing: The world she wanted, Einstein’s “huge world,” and herself, grown up, in the middle, with big white wings like a swan’s.

The Twelve Dancing Princesses by Patricia A. McKillip

One day long ago in a faraway country, a young soldier, walking home from a battle he had fought for the king, found himself lost in a forest. The road he followed dwindled away, leaving him standing among silent trees, with the sun just setting at his back, and the moon just rising ahead of him. Caught alone and astray between night and day, he thought to himself, There are worse things that could be.

He had seen many of them on the battlefield. He was alone because he had watched his best friend die; he had given his last few coins to another soldier trying to walk home with only one foot. But he himself, though worn and bloodied with battle, had kept all his bones, and his eyes, and he even had a little bread and cheese in his pack to eat. He settled himself into a tangle of tree roots, where he could watch the moon, and took out his simple meal. He had opened his mouth to take the first bite when a voice at his elbow said, "One bite is a feast to those who have nothing."

He turned, wondering who had crept up so noiselessly to sit beside him. It was a very old woman. Her bones bumped under the surface of her brown, sagging skin like the tree roots under the earth. Her pale eyes, which now held only a memory of the blue they had been, were fixed on the heel of bread, the rind of cheese in his hand. He sighed, for he was very hungry. But so must she be, scuttling like an animal among the trees, with no one to care for her. There are worse things, he thought, than having a little less of something.

So he said, tearing the bread and cheese apart and giving her half, "Then feast with me."

"You are kind, young soldier," she said in her high wavery voice, and bit into her scanty supper as if it might vanish before she could finish it. After she had swallowed her last bite and searched for crumbs, she spoke again. "What is your name?"

"Val," he answered.

"A good name for a soldier. Did you win the battle?"

Val shrugged. "So they say. I could not see, from where I stood, that winning was much better than losing."

"And now what will you do?"

"I don't know. My younger brother has married and taken care of the family farm and our parents while I have been fighting. I will find my way back and show them that I'm

still alive, and then find something to do in the world. After all, someone with nothing has nothing to lose."

"You have a fair and honest face," the old woman said. "That's something." Her pale eyes caught moonlight and glinted, so suddenly and strangely, that he started. "How would you like to be king?"

He swallowed a laugh along with a lump of bread. "Better than being a beggar."

"Then follow this road through the forest. It will take you into the next kingdom, where the king and queen there are desperate for help. They have twelve beautiful daughters—"

"Twelve!"

"None of them will marry; they will laugh at every suitor. The king locks them in their room every night; and every morning he finds them sleeping so soundly, they will not wake until noon, and at the foot of every bed, a pair of satin shoes so worn with dancing, they must be thrown away. But no one knows how the princesses get out of the room, or where they go to dance. The king has promised his kingdom and a daughter to any man who can solve this mystery."

"Any man," Val repeated, and felt a touch of wonder in his heart, where before there had been nothing. "Even me."

"Even you. But you must be careful. The king is half mad with worry and fear for his daughters. He will kill any man who fails, even princes who might one day marry his daughters."

The young soldier pondered that. "Well," he said softly. "I have faced death before. No one ever offered to make me king if I survived." He stood up. "There's moon enough to see by, tonight. Where is the road to that kingdom?"

"Under your feet," she answered, and there it was, washed with light and winding among the trees.

Val stared at the old woman; her face rippled into a thousand wrinkles as she smiled.

"Two things. One: Drink nothing that the princesses give you. And two"—she touched the dusty cloak at his back—"this will make you invisible when you follow them at night. It pays," she added, as he slid his pack strap over his shoulder, "to be kind to crones."

“So I hope,” he breathed, and stepped onto the moonlit road, wondering if he would find death at its end, or love.

Death, he thought instantly, when he met the father of the twelve princesses. The king, wearing black velvet and silver mail, was tall and gaunt, with long, iron-gray hair and a lean, furrowed face. His eyes were black and terrible with frustration and despair. He wore a sword so long and heavy, it would have dragged on the ground at Val’s side. He kept one hand always on it; Val wondered if he used it to slay the princes who failed him.

But he spoke to the young soldier with courtesy. Val found himself soaking in a fragrant bath while a barber cut his hair. Then he dressed in fine, elegant clothes, though he refused, for no reasons he gave, to part with his torn, dusty cloak. He sat down to a meal so wondrously cooked that he could scarcely name what he ate. When night fell, the king took him to the princesses’ bedchamber.

The doors to the long chamber opened to such color, such rich wood and fabric, such movement of slender, jeweled hands and glowing hair, and bright, curious eyes, so many sweet, laughing voices, that Val froze on the threshold, mute with astonishment that any place so lovely and full of grace could exist in the world he knew. “My daughters,” the king said as they floated toward him, breasting the air like swans in their lacy, flowing nightgowns. “The queen named them after flowers. Aster, Bluet, Columbine, Delphinium, Eglantine, Fleur, Gardenia, Heather, Iris, Jonquil, Lily, and Mignonette. She could not find an appropriate flower for K.”

“Kumquat,” one with long, golden hair giggled behind her hands.

“Knotweed,” another said with an explosion of laughter into her nearest sister’s shoulder. Then they were all silent, their eyes of amber, emerald, sapphire, unblinking and wide, watching Val like a circle of cats, he thought, watching a sparrow.

He said, scarcely hearing himself, while his own eyes were charmed from face to face, “There are folk names for flowers, sometimes, that queens may not know. Kestrel’s Eye, farmers call a kind of sunflower, for its smallness and the color of its center.”

“Kestrel,” a princess with a mass of dark, curly hair and golden eyes repeated. Her beauty held more dignity and assurance than her sisters’; her eyes, smiling at the handsome young stranger, seemed full of secrets. “A pretty word. You might have been Kestrel, then, Lily, and Mignonette would have been you, if our mother had known.”

She was the oldest, Val guessed, and was proved right when the youngest protested, “But, Aster, I am Mignonette; I do not want to be Lily.”

“Don’t worry, goose, you may stay yourself.” She yawned, then, and stepped forward to kiss their grim father. “How tired I am, suddenly! I could sleep for a month!”

“I wish you all would,” the king murmured, bending as one by one they brushed his face with kisses.

They only laughed at him and vanished behind the hangings of lace and gauze around their beds; they were as silent then as if they had already begun to dream.

The king showed Val a small room at the end of the bedchamber, where he could pretend to sleep as he waited for the princesses to reveal the mystery of their dancing. “Many men have come here,” the king said, “seeking to win my kingdom, thinking it a trifling matter to outwit my daughters and take my crown. They are all dead, now, even the jesting, lighthearted princes. My daughters show no mercy, and neither do I. But if you fail, I will be sorry.”

Val bowed his head. “So will I,” he answered. “How strange it seems that yesterday I had nothing to lose, and today I have everything. Except love.”

“That alone drives me mad,” the king said harshly. “They can love no one. Nothing. They laugh at the young men I put to death. As if they are spellbound ...” He turned, begging rather than warning as he closed the door. “Do not fail.”

Val sat down on the bed, which was the first he had seen in many months, and the last he dared sleep in. He had just pulled off his boots when the door opened, and the eldest, Aster, appeared, carrying a cup of wine. She handed it to Val. “We always share a cup with guests, for friendship’s sake.

My father forgot to tell us your name.”

“My name is Val. Thank you for the wine.” He pretended to take a sip while he wondered blankly how to pretend to finish the cup under her watchful eyes.

“A proper name for a prince.”

“I suppose it is, but I am a soldier, returning home after battle.”

Her brows rose. “And you stopped here, to try for a crown on your way. You should have kept going. There is nothing for you here but what you escaped in battle.”

He smiled, holding her eyes, while he poured the wine into a boot standing at his knee. "There are better memories here," he said, and tilted the cup against his mouth as if he were draining it dry.

He stretched out on the bed when Aster left, and did not move when he heard the door open again. "Look at him," one of them mocked. "Sleeping as if he were already dead."

"I put a stronger potion into the wine," another answered. "His eyes were far too clear."

Then he heard laughter in the princess' bedchamber, and the sound of cupboards, chests, and cases being opened. He waited, watching them while he pretended to snore. They dressed themselves in bright silks, and lace and creamy velvet gowns; they tied the ribbons of new satin dancing slippers around their ankles. They took rings and earrings and strands of pearls out of their jewel cases, and they spun one another's hair into amazing confections threaded with ribbons. Val had thought them beautiful before; now they seemed enchanted, exquisite, unreal, as if he had drunk the wine and were dreaming them. He was so entranced, he forgot to snore. Aster came to look sharply at him through the open door, but another sister only laughed.

"He sleeps so deeply, he has forgotten how to breathe."

Aster went to a bed in the middle of the chamber. She knocked three times on the carved headboard, and the entire bed abruptly disappeared, leaving a dark, oblong hole in the floor. Like a grave, Val thought, feeling his heart beat at the strangeness of it. In a long, graceful line, beginning with A and ending with M, the princesses descended into the earth.

The wet pool of wine at the bottom of one boot cleared Val's amazed thoughts a little as he pulled them on; he remembered to fling his worn cloak over his shoulders before he left. He glanced into one of the many mirrors in the bedchamber as he hurried after Mignonette. *There is no soldier,* the mirror told him. *The room is empty.*

Fearing that the hole in the earth might close behind the princesses, he followed too closely. His first step down the broad, winding steps caught the hem of Mignonette's gown.

She said, startled, "Who is there? Aster, Lily, someone pulled at my dress."

All their faces looked back toward Val, a lovely, silent chain of princesses stretching down the steps. Aster turned away first, picking up her own silks. “Don’t be a goose, Mignonette; you caught your skirt on a splinter.”

“The steps are marble,” Mignonette muttered. “And I have a bad feeling about tonight.”

But no one answered her. Val saw a shining ahead, like a thousand touches of starlight. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, the princesses began to walk down a wide road lined with trees. The leaves on the trees were moonlight, it seemed to Val; they were silver fire. They were silver, he realized finally, with such wonder that he could scarcely breathe. He reached up to touch such beauty, and then, beginning to think again, he broke off a twig bearing four or five leaves to show to the king.

The tree gave a splintering crack as if a branch had fallen; Mignonette whirled again. “What is that noise?” she cried. “You all must have heard it!”

Val held his breath. Her sisters glanced indifferently around them. “It was the wind,” one said. “It was fireworks from the dance,” another offered.

“It sounded,” Aster said lightly, “like a heart breaking.”

They turned then onto another broad, tree-lined road. Val closed his eyes and opened them again, but what he saw did not change: All the leaves on these trees were made of gold. Like tears of gold they glowed and shimmered and melted down the branches; they flowed into Val’s outstretched hand. Again he broke the slenderest of twigs; again the tree made a sound as if it had been split by lightning.

“Another broken heart,” Aster said after Mignonette had screamed and complained, and her sisters had bade her to stop fussing so, they would never get to the dance. Only Val heard her whisper, as she trudged after them, “I have a bad feeling about tonight.”

On the third road he broke off a cluster of leaves made of diamonds. They burned of white fire in the moonlight, a light so pure and cold, it hurt his eyes. Mignonette stamped her foot and wailed at the sound the tree made, but her sisters, impatient now, only hurried toward the lake at the end of the road.

Only Aster slowed to walk with her. Her voice was as calm as ever as she spoke to Mignonette, but she searched the diamond-studded dark behind them now and then, as if she sensed their invisible follower.

“I have a bad feeling about tonight,” Mignonette said stubbornly.

Aster only answered, “We are almost there. One more night and we will never have to leave again.”

On the shore of the lake, twelve boats waited for them. Out of each boat rose a shadowy figure to take the hand of the princess who came to him and help her into the boat. Val paused almost too long, trying to see the faces of the richly dressed men who were pushing the boats into the water. He whispered, suddenly sick at heart, “I have a bad feeling about tonight.”

He realized then that the boats were floating away from him. He stepped hastily into the last one; it rocked a little until he caught his balance. Mignonette, whose boat he had the misfortune to enter, promptly raised her voice, calling to her sisters, “I think someone got into the boat with me!”

Her sisters’ laughter fell as airily as windblown petals around them; even the man who rowed her smiled. “Don’t fret, my Mignonette. I could row a dozen invisible guests across the water.” His mouth did not move, Val saw, when he spoke. His eyes were closed. And yet he rowed steadily and straight toward the brightly lit castle on the other side of the lake. Torches burned on all its towers and walls; its casements opened wide; candlelight and music spilled from them. Val, his heart hammering, his hands as cold as if he waited for the beginning of a battle, did not dare move until Mignonette left the boat.

The man, pulling it ashore, commented puzzledly, “It does seem heavier than usual.”

“You see!” Mignonette began. But he only put his arm around her as she stepped ashore, and kissed her with his mouth that never moved.

“Never mind, my smallest love,” he said. “Tomorrow you will have nothing to fear ever again.”

Val, following them into the castle, saw the light from the torches at the gate fall over their faces. He stopped abruptly, his bones turned to iron, and his blood turned to ice at what he saw. “This,” he heard himself whisper, “is the worst thing that could be.”

Still, he forced himself into the castle, to watch the dance.

In the vast hall where the music played, the walls glowed with rare, polished wood. Traceries of gold leaf outlined the carvings on the ceiling. Candles in gold and silver and diamond holders stood everywhere, illumining the princesses’ enchanting, sparkling faces. They began to dance at once, smiling into the faces of their princes, who may once

have been handsome but who, to Val's unenchanted eyes, had been dead a day too long. Their lips were grim, motionless gashes in their bloodless faces; their eyes never opened. The room was crowded with watchers, all holding empty wine cups and tapping a foot to the music. The music, fierce and merciless, never let the dancers rest; it sent them breathless and spinning around the floor. Ribbons came undone, hems tore, pearls broke and scattered everywhere. Still, the princesses danced, their smiles never wavering at the faces of the dead who danced with them. Their satin slippers grew soiled and scuffed; the thin fabric wore through, until their bare feet blistered against the gleaming floor. Still, they danced, driven by blind musicians who had no reason to rest; they had left their lives elsewhere.

"What a celebration there will be tomorrow night!" Val heard many times as he waited. "The wedding of twelve princesses, and a dance that will never end!"

As the lake grew gray with dawn, the music finally stopped. In silence, drooping with exhaustion in their boats, the princesses were returned to the far shore, where they kissed the frozen faces of their princes and bade them farewell until tomorrow. Val walked ahead of them this time so that he could reach his bed and pretend to sleep before they came back. He kept pace with Aster. She looked a wilted flower, he thought; her eyes seemed troubled, now, but by what she could not imagine. She stumbled a little, on pebbles or the bright, sharp metal of fallen leaves, wincing where her shoes had worn through to her bare feet. He wanted to take her hand, help her walk, comfort her, but he guessed that, in such a place, he could be less alive to her than the dead.

When he saw the stairs, he paused to take off his boots so that he could run up without being heard. As he passed Aster, a boot tilted in his hand, spilling a little red wine on the steps. He saw Aster's eyes widen at it, her step falter. But she did not speak to her sisters. Nor did she say anything when, moments later, she found him sleeping in his bed. Another sister said tiredly, "At least he'll die before we wake. And then no one will have to die for us again."

He waited until they were all hidden in their beds, and nothing moved in the room but morning light. Then he rose, and crept out, with his boots in one hand and the magical leaves in the other, to speak to the king.

The king was pacing outside his daughters' bedchamber; he had not slept that night, either. His hand tightening and loosening and tightening again on his great sword, he gazed wordlessly at Val out of his lightless eyes until Val spoke.

"They go down to the underworld," Val said. "They dance with the dead." He showed the king the three sprays of leaves, silver, gold and diamond, that could only have come from such an enchanted place. His hand trembled with weariness and horror; so did his voice. "Tomorrow night, they will wed their dead princes, and you will never see them again."

The king, with a shout of rage and grief, tore the leaves from Val's hand and flung open the bedchamber doors. Exhausted, astonished faces appeared from between the hangings in every bed. The king showed them the leaves; sunlight flared from them, turned gold and silver and diamond into fire.

"What are these?" he demanded. "Where are they from? You tell me, daughters. Tell me where to go get them. And then I will know where to go to find you."

They stared at the leaves. Little by little, as if before they had only dreamed themselves awake, their faces came alive to terror and confusion. From beneath their beds came the sound of a great, splintering crack, as if a tree had been struck by lightning, or a heart had broken.

Mignonette was the first to burst into tears. "No, it isn't real," she sobbed. "It was a dream! You can't have taken those leaves from a dream!"

"Val followed you," the king said while all around him his daughters wept as if their hearts had broken. "He brought these back with him to show me."

"How could it have been real?" Aster whispered, shivering in her bed while tears slipped down her face. "We were—we pledged ourselves in marriage to—we danced with—"

"Dead princes," Val said. She stared at him, her face as white as alabaster. "Which dead princes?" she asked him. "The ones our father killed because of us?"

"I don't know," he answered gently, though he shuddered, too, at the thought.

She closed her eyes against a nightmare. "You might have died, too, Val, if you had not kept watch."

“I knew someone followed us,” Mignonette sobbed to her sisters. “I tried to tell you. And you would not believe me!”

“You were all enchanted,” Val said.

Aster opened her eyes again, looked at him. “Did I know you were there?” she wondered softly. “Or did I only wish it?”

There was another sound, the clang of the king’s great sword as he drew it from the scabbard and flung it to the floor. Then he took the crown from his head and held it out to Val. “Take my kingdom,” he said with great relief. “You have broken the spell over my house, and over me. I no longer want to rule; there are too many innocent dead among my memories.”

“Well,” Val said uncertainly, turning the crown, which looked too big for him, over in his hands. “There are worse things that could be.”

He lifted his eyes, looked at Aster, for comfort, and for friendship. She smiled a little, through her tears, and he saw that she agreed with him: There were worse things that could be than what he had: a kingdom and a choice of flowers from A to M.